THE BELFRY

MAY SINCLAIR

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THE BELFRY

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THE BELFRY

BY

MAY SINCLAIR

AUTHOR OF "THE THREE SISTERS," ETC.

New York

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BOOK I

MY BOOK

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BOOK I

MY BOOK

I

Of course this story can't be published as it stands just yet. Not—if I'm to be decent—for another generation, because, thank Heaven, they're still alive. (They've had me there, as they've always had me everywhere.) How they managed it I can't think. I don't mean merely at the end, though that was stupendous, but how they ever managed it. It seems to me they must have taken *all* the risks, always.

I suppose if you asked him he'd say, "That's how." It was certainly the way they managed the business of living. Perhaps it's why they managed it on the whole so well. I remember how when I was shilly-shallying about that last job of mine he said, "Take it. Take it. If you can risk living at all, my dear fellow, you can risk that."

And he added, "If I'd only *your* luck!"

Well, that's exactly what he did have. He had my luck, I mean the luck I ought to have had, all the time, from the beginning to the very end. But there is one thing he can't take from me, and that is the telling of this story. He can hold it up as long as he lives—as long as *she* lives —as he has held up pretty nearly everything where I was concerned. But he can't take it from me. He doesn't "want" it. Even he with his infernal talent couldn't do anything with it. Unscrupulous as he was, and I assure you he'd stick at nothing (he'd "take" his mother's last agony if he "wanted" it badly enough), indecent as he was, he'd stick at that.

I don't mean he couldn't take his wife, part of her, anyhow, at a pinch. And I don't mean he couldn't take himself, his own emotions, his own eccentricities, if he happened to want them, and his own meannesses, if nobody else's, so to speak, would do. But he couldn't and wouldn't take his own big things, particularly not that last thing.

When I say that I can't publish this story yet as it stands, I'm not forgetting that I *have* published the end of it already. But only in the way of business; to publish that sort of thing was what I went out for; it was all part of my Special Correspondent's job.

And when you think that it was just touch and go—Why, if I hadn't bucked up and taken that job when he told me to I might have missed him. No amount of hearing about him would have been the same thing. I had to see him.

What I wrote then doesn't count. I had to tell what I saw just after I had seen it. I had to take it as I saw it, a fragment snapped off from the rest of him, and dated October 11th, 1914, as if it didn't belong to him; as if he were only another splendid instance. And of course I had to leave *her* out.

Told like that, it didn't amount to much.

This is the real telling.

I must get away from the end, right back to the beginning.

I suppose, to be accurate, the very beginning was the day I first met him in nineteen-six—no, nineteen-five it must have been. It was at Blackheath Football Ground, the last match of the season, when Woolwich Arsenal played East Kent and beat them by two goals and a try. He was there as a representative of the Press, "doing" the match for some sporting paper.

He held me up at the barrier (yes, he held me up in the first moment of our acquaintance) while he fumbled for his pass. He had given the word "Press" with an exaggerated aplomb that showed he was young to his job, and the gate-keeper challenged him. It was, in fact, the exquisite self-consciousness of the little man that made me look at him. And he caught me looking at him; he blushed, caught himself blushing and smiled to himself with the most delicious appreciation of his own absurdity. And as he stood there fumbling, and holding me up while he argued with the gate-keeper, who didn't know him, I got his engaging twinkle. It was as if he looked at me and said, "See me swank just then? Funny, wasn't it?"

He hung about on the edge of the crowd for a while with his hands in his pockets, sucking his little blond moustache and looking dreamy and rather incompetent. I was a full-blown journalist even then, and I remember feeling a sort of pity for his youth. He was so obviously on his maiden trip, and obviously, I fancied, doomed never to arrive in any port.

Well—well; I came upon him afterwards at a crisis in the game. He was taking notes in shorthand with a sort of savagery between his tense and concentrated glares at the scrimmage that was then massed in the centre of the field. Woolwich Arsenal and East Kent, locked in each other's bodies, now struggled and writhed and butted like two immense beasts welded together by the impact of their battle, now swayed and quivered and snorted as one beast torn by a solitary and mysterious rage.

Self-consciousness had vanished from my man. He stood, leaning forward with his legs a little apart. His boyish face was deeply flushed; he had sucked and bitten his blond moustache into a wisp; he was breathing heavily, with his mouth ajar; his very large and conspicuous blue

eyes glittered with a sort of passion. (He wore those eyes in his odd little ugly face like some inappropriate decoration.)

All these symptoms declared that he was "on." They made up a look that I was soon to know him by.

I remember marvelling at his excitement.

I remember also discussing the match with him as we went back to town. It must have been then that he began to tell me about himself: that his name was James Tasker Jevons; that he lived, or hoped to live, by going about the country and reporting the big cricket and football matches.

At least he called it reporting. I shouldn't think there has ever been any reporting like it before or since.

I told him I was out for my paper, the *Morning Standard,* too. Not exactly reporting, in *his* sense (I little knew what *his* sense was when I put it that way) ; and there left it. You see, I didn't want to rub it into the poor chap that the stranger he had been unfolding himself to so quaintly was a cut above his job.

But he saw through it. I don't know how he managed to convey to me that my delicacy needn't suffer. Anyhow, he must have had some scruples of his own, since he waited for another context before remarking quietly that what I was doing now he would be doing in another six months. (And he was.) These things, he said, took time, and he gave himself six months. (Yes; in less than six months he was holding me up, again, in my own paper. I had to wait till he was "out" before I could get in.) He didn't seem to boast so much as to trace for my benefit the path of some natural force, some upward-tending, indestructible Energy that happened to be him.

All this I remember. But I cannot remember by what stages we arrived at dining together, as we did that night

in a little restaurant in Soho. Perhaps there were no stages; we may have simply leaped by one bound at that consummation. He had swung himself into my compartment as the train was leaving the platform at Blackheath; so I suppose it was destiny. After that I was tempted to conceive that he fastened on me as on something that he had need of; but I think it was rather that I fell to his mysterious attraction.

While we dined he informed me further that he had been reporting football matches for six weeks. Before that he had been proof-reader for a firm of printers for about a year. Before that he had been a compositor. And before that again he had worked in an office with his father, who was Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths for some parish down in Hertfordshire. He chucked that because he found that the registration of births, marriages and deaths was spoiling his handwriting quite as much as his handwriting was spoiling the registration of births, marriages and deaths. (He was, he said, cultivating a careless, scholarly hand.) He liked his present job, because it took him out pretty often into the open air. Also he liked looking on at football matches and prize fights.

He said it made him feel manly.

You should have seen him sitting there and telling me these things in a gentle, throaty and rather thick voice with a cockney accent and a sort of tenor ring in it and a queer, humorous intonation that was like an audible twinkle, as if he saw himself as he thought I must see him, mainly in the light of absurdity. You should have seen his face, its thin cheeks, its vivid flush, its queer, inquisitive, contradictory nose that had a slender, high bridge and a tilted, pointed end in profile and three-quarters, and turned suddenly all broad and blunt in a full view; and his mouth that stood ajar with excitement, and even in

moments of quiescence failed to hide the tips of two rather prominent white teeth pressed down on the lower lip. I don't say there was anything unmanly about Jevons's figure (he wasn't noticeably undersized), or about his mouth and jaw. I knew a great General with a mouth and jaw like that, and he was one of the handsomest figures in the Service. I'm not hinting at anything like effeminacy in Jevons, only at a certain oddity that really saved him. If he'd been handsome he'd have been dreadful. His flush, his decorative eyes, his dark eyebrows and eyelashes, his sleek, light brown hair, would have made him vulgar. As it was, his queerness gave them a sort of point.

I dwell on these physical details because, afterwards, I found myself continually looking at him as if to see where his charm lay. To see, I suppose, what *she* saw in him.

If anybody had asked me that night what I saw in him myself beyond an ordinary little journalist "on the make," I don't suppose I could have told them. But there's no doubt that I felt his charm, or that night would have been the end instead of the beginning.

We sat in the restaurant when he had done telling me about himself; I remember we sat quite a long time discussing an English writer—our contemporary—whom I rather considered I had discovered. In those days I used to apply him as an infallible test. Jevons had read every word of him; it was he, in fact, who brought him into the conversation. He confessed afterwards that he had done it on purpose. He had been testing *me*.

Even so our acquaintance might have lapsed but for the thing that happened when the waiter came up with the bill. My share of it was three and twopence, and I found myself with only ninepence in my pocket. I had to borrow half a crown from Jevons. You mayn't see anything very dreadful in that. I didn't at the time, and there

wasn't. The dreadful thing was that I forgot to pay him back.

Yes. Something happened that put Jevons and his half-crown out of my head for long enough. I forgot to pay him, and he had to go without his dinner for three nights in consequence. It was his last half-crown.

He told me this as an immense joke, long afterwards.

And Viola Thesiger cried.

That crying of hers, that child-like softening and breaking down under him, in itself so unexpected (I didn't know she could do it), that sudden and innocent catastrophe, was the first sign to me that I was done for—wiped out. There wasn't any violence or any hysteria about it, only grief, only pity. It was an entirely simple, gentle and beautiful performance, and it took place in my rooms after Jevons had left us. But, as I say, this was long afterwards. The agony of my undoing was a horribly protracted affair.

I needn't say that what happened—I mean the thing that made me forget all about Jevons and his half-crown—was Viola Thesiger.

I had his address, but the next day—the day after the match—was Sunday, so I couldn't get the postal order I had meant to send him. And on Monday she walked into my rooms at ten in the morning.

The appointment, I may remark, was for nine-thirty. I had fixed that early hour for it because I wanted to get it done with. I wasn't going to have my morning murdered with violence when it was two hours old; neither did I intend it to be poisoned by the thought of this interview hanging over me at the end.

I had just sent for Pavitt, my man, and told him that if Miss Thesiger called he was on no account to let her in. He was to say that the appointment was for nine-thirty

and that Mr. Furnival was now engaged. She would have to call again at three if she wished to see him. When engaging a typist it is as well to begin as you mean to go on, and I was anxious to let Miss Thesiger know at once that I was not a man who would stand any nonsense. I was abominably busy that morning.

And Pavitt let her in. (It was the first time he had failed in this way.) He never explained or apologized for it afterwards. He seemed to think that when I had seen Miss Thesiger I would see, even more vividly than he did, how impossible it was to do otherwise, unless he had relinquished all claim to manhood and to chivalry. The look he sent me from the threshold as he retreated backwards, drawing the door upon himself like a screen and shutting me in alone with her, said very plainly, "You may curse, sir, and you may swear; but if you think you'll get out of it any better than I have you're mistaken."

Yes: it was something more than her appearance and her manner, though they, in all conscience, were enough.

I do not know what appearance and what manner, if any, are proper to a young woman calling on a young man at his rooms to seek employment. The mere situation may, for all I know, bristle with embarrassments. Anyhow, I can imagine that in some hands it might have moments, let us say, of extreme difficulty on either side. Miss Thesiger's appearance and her manner were perfect; but they didn't suggest by any sign or shade that she was a young woman seeking employment, that she was a young woman seeking anything; but rather that she was a young woman to whom all things naturally came.

She approached me very slowly. Her adorable little salutation, with all its maturity, its gravity, was somehow essentially young. She was rather tall, and her figure had the same serious maturity in youth. She carried her small

head high, and held her shoulders well back, so that she got a sort of squareness into the divine slope of them (people hadn't begun to slouch forward from the hips in those days), a squareness that agreed somehow with the character of her small face. I didn't know then whether it was a pretty face or not. I daresay it was a bit too odd and square for prettiness, and, as for beauty, that had all gone into the lines of her body (which *was* beautiful, if you like). When you looked carefully, you got a little square, white forehead, and straight eyebrows of the same darkness as her hair, and very distinct on the white, and eyes also very dark and distinct, and fairly crystalline with youth; and a little white and very young nose that started straight and ended absurdly in a little soft knob that had a sort of kink in it; and a mouth which would have been too large for her face if it hadn't made room for itself by tilting up at the corners; and then a little square white chin and jaw; they were thrust forward, but so lightly and slenderly that it didn't matter. It doesn't sound—does it?—as if she could have been pretty, let alone beautiful; and yet—and yet she managed that little head of hers and that little odd face so as to give an impression of beauty or of prettiness. It was partly the oddness of the face and head, coming on the top of all that symmetry, that perfection, that made the total effect of her so bewildering. I can't find words for the total effect (I don't know that you ever got it all at once, and I certainly didn't get it then), and if I were to tell you that what struck me first about her was something perverse and wilful and defiant, this would be misleading.

She smiled in her mature, perfunctory manner as she took the chair I gave her. She cast out her muff over my writing-table, and flung back the furs that covered her breast and shoulders, as if she had come to stay, as if it

were four o'clock in the afternoon and I had asked her to tea for the first time.

I remember saying, "That's right. I'm afraid this room is a bit warm, isn't it?"—as if she had done something uninvited and a little unexpected, and I wished to reassure her. As if, too, I desired to assert my position as the giver of assurances.

(And it was I who needed them, not she.)

She hadn't been in that room five minutes before she had created a situation; a situation that bristled with difficulty and danger.

To begin with, she was so young. She couldn't have been, then, a day older than one-and-twenty. My first instinct (at least, I suppose it was my first) was to send her away; to tell her that I was afraid she wouldn't do, that she was too unpunctual, and that I had found, between nine-thirty and ten o'clock, somebody who would suit me rather better. Any lie I could think of, so long as I got out of it. So long as I got *her* out of it.

I don't know how it was she so contrived to impress me as being in for something, some impetuous adventure, some enterprise of enormous uncertainty. It may have been because she looked so well-cared-for and expensive. I do not understand these matters, but her furs, and her tailor-made suit of dark cloth, and the little black velvet hat with the fur tail in it were not the sort of clothes I had hitherto seen worn by typists seeking for employment. So that I doubted whether financial necessity could have driven her to my door. Or else I had a premonition. She herself had none. She was guileless and unaware of taking any risks. And that, I think, was what disturbed me. The situation bristled because she so ignored all difficulty or danger.

Please don't imagine that I regarded myself as dangerous or even difficult, or her as being, in any vulgar sense,

out for adventure, or as balancing herself even for amusement on any perilous edge. It was not what she was *out* for, it was, as I say, what she might possibly be in for; and what she would, in consequence, let me in for too. She made me feel responsible.

"Let me see," I said; "it's typing, isn't it?"

I began raking through drawers and pigeon-holes, pretending to find her letter and the sample of her work that she had sent me, though I knew all the time that they lay under my hand hidden by the blotter. I wanted to give myself time; I wanted to create the impression that I was old at this game; that I had to do with scores and scores of young women seeking employment; to make her realize the grim fact of competition; to saturate her with the idea that she was only one of scores and scores, all docketed and pigeon-holed, any one of whom might have superior qualities; when it would be easy enough to say, "I'm sorry, but the fact is, I rather think I've engaged somebody already."

"Yes," she said, "it's typing. I can't do anything else. But if you want shorthand, I could learn it."

This gave me an opening. "Well—I'm sorry—but the fact is——"

"Did you like what I sent you?"

That staggered me. I hadn't allowed for her voice. For a moment I wondered wildly what *had* she sent me?

"Oh, yes. I liked it. But——" I began it again.

She leaned forward this time, peering under my elbow (the minx! I'm convinced she knew the infernal thing was there).

"I see," she said. "You've lost it. Don't bother. I can do another. As long as you liked it, that's all right."

I remember thinking violently: "It isn't all right. It's all wrong. And the more I like it (if I *do* like it) the

worse it's going to be." But all I said was, "You wrote from Canterbury, didn't you?"

"Yes."

It was as if she challenged me with: "Why not? Why shouldn't one write from Canterbury?" And she stuck out her little chin as her eyes opened fire on me at close range.

"Do you live there?" I said.

"Yes." She corrected herself. "My people live there."

"Oh! Because—in that case—I'm sorry—but—the fact is, I'm afraid——" I floundered, and she watched me floundering. Then I plunged. "I must have a typist who lives in London." (And I might have added "a typist who won't open fire on me at close range.")

"But," she said, "I do—at least, I'm going to to-morrow evening."

I must have sat staring then quite a long time, not at her, but at one of Roland Simpson's sketches on the wall in front of me.

She followed, but not quite accurately, the direction of my thoughts.

"If you want references, I can give you heaps. General Thesiger's my uncle. Why? Do you know him?"

I had ceased staring. He was not the General I knew, but she had spoken a sufficiently distinguished name. I said as much.

"Of course lots of people know him," she went on with a sort of radiant rapidity. "And he knows lots of people. But I wouldn't write to him if I were you. He'll only be rude, and ask you who the devil *you* are. There's my father, Canon Thesiger. It's no good writing to him, either. It'll worry him. And there's—no, you mustn't bother the Archbishop. But there's the Dean. You might write to *him!* And there's Colonel Braithwaite and Mrs.

Braithwaite. They're all dears. You might write to any of them. Only I'd much rather you didn't."

"Why?" I said. I thought I was entitled to ask why.

"Because," she said, "it'll only mean a lot more bother for me."

I believe I meditated on this before I asked her, "Why should it?"

"Because it isn't easy to get away and earn your own living in this country. And they'll try, poor dears, to stop me. And they can't."

"If they don't," I said, "are you sure it won't mean a lot of bother for *them?*"

"Not," she said gravely, "if they're left alone and not worried. It will, of course, if you go and write and stir them all up again."

"I see. For the moment, then, they are placated?"

"Rather." (I wondered on what grounds.) "We settled *that* last night."

"Then—" I said, "forgive my asking so many questions—your people know you had this appointment with me?"

Her eyebrows took a little tortured twist in her pity for my stupidity.

"Oh no. That would have upset them all for nothing. It doesn't do to worry them with silly details. You see, they don't know anything about you."

It was exquisite, the innocence with which she brought it out.

"But," I insisted, "that's rather my point. *You* don't know anything about me either, do you?"

"Yes, I do. I knew," she said, "the minute I came into the room. If it comes to that, you don't know anything about *me.*"

I said I did; I knew the minute *she* came into the room.

And she faced me with, "Well then, you see!" as if that settled it.

I suppose it did settle it. I must have decided that since nobody could stop her, and I wasn't, after all, a villain, if she insisted on being somebody's typist, she had very much better be mine. You see, she was so young. I wanted to protect her. Not that there was anything helpless and pathetic about her, anything, except her innocence, that appealed to me for protection. On the contrary, she struck me as a creature of high courage and defiance. That, of course, was what constituted the danger. She would insist on taking risks. Presently I heard myself saying, "Yes, the Close, Canterbury. I've got that. But where am I to find you here?"

She gave me an address that made me whistle.

I asked her if she knew anything, anything whatever, about the people of the house?

She said she didn't. She had chosen it because it had a nice green door, and there was an Angora cat on the doorstep. A large orange cat with green eyes.

Had she actually taken rooms there?

No. But she had chosen them (I think she said because they had pretty chintz curtains.) She was going to take them *now*.

She had her hand on the door. She was eager, like a child that has got off at last, after irritating delay.

I closed the door against her precipitate flight. I said I thought we could settle that here, over the telephone.

And I settled it.

Having settled it, I sent Pavitt, my man, to get rooms for her that afternoon in Hampstead, with his sister-in-law, in a house overlooking the Heath. I said I couldn't promise her chintz curtains and a green door and an orange

Angora cat with green eyes, but I thought she would be fairly comfortable with Mrs. Pavitt.

She was.

She told me a week later that the Hampstead rooms *had* chintz curtains and there was a Persian kitten too. A blue Persian, with yellow eyes.

There was. But I didn't tell her who put them there.

The kitten alone (it was a pure-bred Persian) cost me three guineas; and to this day she thinks that Pavitt, who brought it to her, found it on the Heath.

Yet, with all my precautions, there was trouble when Canterbury heard about my typist. (She had become my typist, though I had never said a word about engaging her.)

This, of course, was owing to the criminal secrecy with which Viola conducted her affairs. The Minor Canon wrote to me as if I had seduced, or was about to seduce, his daughter. (He had upset himself by rushing up to take her back to Canterbury, and finding that she wouldn't go with him.) I think, in his excitement, he ordered me to give her up. He was a guileless and indeed a holy man; and it's always the guileless and the holy people who raise the uncleanest scandals. And Mrs. Thesiger wrote, and the General and the Dean; and I've no doubt the Archbishop would have written too, if I hadn't unearthed *my* General at his club, and asked him if he knew the Thesigers, and found out that he did, and implored him to arrange the horrid business for me as best he could. I said he might tell them that if the girl had been left to them to look after her, she would have got into rooms in— I named the street, and testified to the sinister character of the house. And my General wrote and explained to the other General and to the Minor Canon what a thoroughly nice chap I was, and how lamentably they had mis-

understood what I believed he was pleased to call my relations with Miss Thesiger. I'm not at all sure that he didn't even go farther and stick in a lot about my family, and suggest that I was eligible to the extent that, though my fortunes were still to make, I had (besides private means that enabled me to live in spite of journalism) considerable expectations (he knew an aunt of mine—better, it would seem, than I did). In short, that I was a thoroughly nice chap, and that the father of seven daughters (five unmarried) might do far worse than cultivate my acquaintance. He must have gone quite as far as that, or farther, otherwise I couldn't account for the peculiarly tender note that the Minor Canon put into the letter of apology that he wrote me, still less for the invitation I received by the same post from Mrs. Thesiger to spend Whitsuntide with them at Canterbury. (Viola had said she was going home for Whitsuntide.)

Dear lady, she was herself the daughter of a Canon, and she had lived all her life in a cathedral close, and the atmosphere of a cathedral close may foster innocence, but I cannot think it could have been entirely responsible for the kind of indiscretion Mrs. Thesiger was guilty of. Neither do I think Mrs. Thesiger was entirely responsible herself. She is a nice woman, and I am sure she couldn't have written as she did unless my friend the General had led her to believe that there was some sort of an understanding between me and Viola. But still, for all she knew about me, I might have been a villain. Not perhaps the gross villain the Minor Canon took me for, but a villain in some profound and subtle way inappreciable to my friend the General.

Well, of course I didn't spend Whitsuntide with the Thesigers at Canterbury. It would have been sheer waste of Viola. For the worst of all this confounded rumpus

was that it made me put off proposing to Viola till she had forgotten all about it. She would never have listened to me while the trail of the scandal still lingered.

In fact, it was only the marked coldness of my manner to her just then that saved me.

It saved me to suffer. I didn't know it was possible to suffer as she made me suffer—I mean as *they* made me, between them.

It didn't begin all at once. It didn't begin, really, for another three months, the end of those six months that Jevons had given himself. Not even then. Not, you may say, for a whole year; because he gave himself another six months as soon as he saw her. He was always giving himself these periods of time, as if, with his mania for taking risks, he was always having some prodigious bet on himself. I never knew a man back his own enterprises as he did.

But until he turned up again I was happy. I say I, not we. I don't know whether Viola was happy or not, though she looked it. I had enough sense to see that her happiness, if she was happy, had nothing to do with me except in so far as I was the humble means, under Providence, of the definite escape from Canterbury.

For I very soon saw what had been the matter with her. She was one of nine, the youngest but one of seven daughters. The Minor Canon had only been able to educate one of the seven properly, because he had had a son at Sandhurst, and the other was still reading for the Bar, which is pretty expensive too if you're as amiably stupid as Bertie Thesiger. (I mention Bertie because, though he doesn't come into this story, his stupidity and his amiability combined to tighten the situation considerably for Viola.) And Mrs. Thesiger had only been able to marry

off two of her seven daughters. Of the others, one (the one who had been to Girton) was a High School teacher in Canterbury and she lived at home; one was a trained nurse and lived at home between cases; that left three girls living continually at home and, as Viola put it, eating their heads off.

These were the circumstances which Viola (with some omissions) recited by way of justification for her revolt; the fact being that she would have revolted anyway. She was, as I have said, a creature of high courage and vitality and she was tied up much too tight in that Cathedral Close, besides being much too well fed; and she longed to do things. To do them with her hands and with her head. She was tired of playing tennis on the velvet lawns of the Canons' gardens; she was tired of calling on the Canons' wives and talking to their daughters. I am aware that Canterbury is a garrison town and that other resources, and other prospects, I suppose, were open to Viola. But Viola was tired of talking to the garrison. I think she would have been tired in any case, even if the garrison hadn't been bespoken, as it were, by her unmarried sisters. (It is, humanly speaking, impossible that, even in a garrison town, seven sisters will *all* marry into the Service, as I fatuously supposed Mrs. Thesiger must have realized when she asked me to Canterbury.) It always bored Viola to do what her family did, and what her family, just because they did it, expected her to do. And somehow, in the long hours spent in the Cathedral Close, she had acquired a taste for what she called "literature," what she innocently believed to be literature. She was of an engaging innocence in this respect; so that typing authors' manuscripts appealed to her as a vocation that combined one of the highest forms of cerebral activity with I don't know what glamour of romantic adventure.

Her enthusiasm, her veneration for the written word made her an admirable typist. But not all at once. To say that she brought to her really horrible task a respect, a meticulous devotion, would give you no idea of the child's attitude; it was a blind, savage superstition that would have been exasperating if it had not been so heart-rending. It cleared gradually until it became intelligent co-operation.

I trained her for six months.

I don't suppose I ever worked harder than I did in that first half year of her. I mean my output was never greater. For every blessed thing I wrote was an excuse for going to see her, or for her coming to see me. It was a perpetual journeying between my rooms in Brunswick Square and her rooms in Hampstead overlooking the Heath. The more I wrote the more I saw of her.

I trained her for six months—until Jevons was ready for her.

When I tell you that she reverenced my performances you may imagine in what spirit she approached his.

For their meeting, as for what happened afterwards, I alone am responsible. I brought it on myself. By sheer quixotic fuss and interference with what, after all, wasn't my affair. For little Jevons most decidedly was not. I might easily have let that sleeping dog lie. He certainly did sleep, in some obscure kennel of London; he had slept ever since I had left him at the door of that restaurant in Soho. He slept almost for the six months he had then given himself.

And then, before (according to his own schedule) he was quite due, he appeared in the columns (in my columns) of the *Morning Standard*. I had almost forgotten his existence; but when I saw his name, James Tasker Jevons, stick out familiarly under the big headlines, I

remembered that that name, on a card with an address, had been lying in my left-hand writing-table drawer all this time; I remembered that it was there because he had lent me half a crown, and that I had never paid him. Then he came back to me—he lived again.

I sent him a postal order and an apology. I referred, very handsomely as I thought, to his cuckoo's nesting in my paper. (I informed him, in fact, that he "did it" better than I did); and because I had worked myself up to a pitch of affability and generosity, I asked him to come and see me at such time as he should be free. And because, also, I was indifferent and lazy and didn't want to be seriously bothered with him, instead of asking him to lunch or dine with me, I said I was generally free myself between four and five.

Between four and five was an hour when Viola was very apt to come in.

In the instant that followed the posting of that letter I saw what I had done. And I wrote to him the next day asking him to dinner, in order that he should not come in between four and five. For some weeks, whenever I fancied he was about due at four o'clock, I wrote and asked him to dinner. That was how I fastened him to me. There wasn't any sense in which he fastened on me. I wasn't by any means his only hope.

I may say at once I was prostrated as any slave before his conversation.

I shall never forget the radiance of his twinkle when he told me he had been sacked three weeks ago from the sporting paper that had provided him with his sole visible means of subsistence. It was his blessed (only he didn't call it blessed) style that had dished him: the suicidal *élan* that he brought to the business. He was warned, he said. He was aware that his existence as a reporter hung

by the bare thread of statement (wearing thinner and thinner) on which he weaved his fantastic web. His editor told him he was engaged to report football, not to play it with the paper. But he couldn't help it. He had got, he said, the ensanguined habit. Still, I was not to imagine that he bungled things. He jolly well knew his way about. In his wildest flights there was a homing impulse; he was preparing a place for himself all the time (that it happened to be *my* place didn't seem to afflict him in the least). Like St. Paul, he knew how to abound and he knew how to abstain. His abstinence, in fact, gave the measure of his abundance. He held himself in for five perilous weeks; and when he let himself rip again it was with a burst that landed him in the front page of the *Morning Standard*.

What he sketched for me had no resemblance to the career of a peaceful man of letters. It was a hot race, a combat as bloody (his own word) as those contests of which he was the delighted eye-witness.

He had come thin and worn out of the struggle, but you gathered that he had borne himself in it with coolness and deliberate caution. His phrases produced a false effect of vehemence and excitement. You saw that he had simply followed out a calculated scheme, not one step of which had miscarried. And you felt that his most passionate affairs would be conducted with the same formidable precision.

I ought to have felt it. For we were precious soon in the thick of it—of his most passionate affair.

I had dined him, I suppose, about three times, and I had lunched him twice. And I had had tea with him once in his bedroom. He was living in one room in a street off the Euston Road, and he called it his bedroom because it looked so much more that than anything else.

I might have let it go at that. But I didn't. I had seen his bedroom. I took the liberty of inquiring into his finances. They were, he said, as yet undeveloped. He had a scheme of his own for improving them, but while it was maturing he was, he certainly *was* open to offers of work. I got him some translation. (He was a fairly good French scholar.)

Then—it was the fatality of the proceedings that impressed them on my memory—then (I forgot to say that at that time I was reader to a firm of publishers; these things are in themselves so inessential to this story) I turned over to him any books that came more into his province than mine. His province, I can tell you, was pretty extensive, too.

He began by doing me the honour to consult me about any instances that seemed doubtful.

And so—you see how carefully I had prepared his path for him—one afternoon he turned up at my rooms, uninvited, between four and five. He said he remembered I had told him I should be free at that hour.

He remembered. Yes; I don't think Tasker Jevons ever forgot anything, anything likely to be useful to him, in his life.

And he hadn't been with me ten minutes before Viola Thesiger came in.

He was saying, "Why the Heaven-afflicted idiot" (his author) "should think it necessary——" when Viola came in.

She came in, and suddenly I made up my mind that she was beautiful. I hadn't seen it before. I don't know why I saw it now. It may have been some turn of her small, squarish head that surprised me with subtle tendernesses and curves; or more likely it may have been her effect on him. I may have seen her with his eyes. I

don't know—I don't know. I hardly like to think he saw anything in her I hadn't seen first.

He stopped talking. They looked at each other. I introduced him. Not to have introduced him would have struck him as a slight.

I ordered tea at once in the hope of hastening his departure. He had been curiously silent since she had come in.

But he didn't go. He just sat there, saying nothing, but looking at her furtively now and again, and blinking, as if looking at her hurt him. Whenever she said anything he stared, with his mouth a little open, breathing heavily.

She hadn't paid very much attention to him. Then, suddenly, as if intrigued by his silence, she said:

"*Who* is the Heaven-afflicted idiot?"

I said, "Ask Mr. Jevons."

She did.

Jevons didn't answer her. He simply looked at her and blinked. Then he looked away again.

"Come," I said, "you might finish what you were going to say."

"I don't know," he muttered, "that I was going to say anything—Oh yes—that thing you sent me. Why the silly blighter should suppose it's necessary to stick in a storm at sea when it's quite obvious he hasn't seen one—he talks about a brig when he means a bark, and from the way he navigates her you'd say the wind blew all ways at once in the Atlantic."

I said it might for all I knew; and I asked him if he'd ever seen a storm at sea himself.

It seemed he had. He'd been ordered a sea-voyage for his health after his spell of printing; and his uncle, who was a sea-captain, took him with him to Hong-Kong in his ship. And he had been all through a cyclone in the Pacific.

I got him—with some difficulty, for he had become extremely shy—I got him to tell us about it.

He did. And by the time he had finished with us we had all been through a cyclone in the Pacific.

It was too much. The little beast could talk almost as well as he wrote. A fellow who can write like Tasker Jevons has no business to talk at all.

Viola left soon after six. He had outstayed her. I went downstairs with her. When I came back to him he was still staring at the doorway she had passed through.

"Who's that girl?" he said.

I said she was my typist.

He meditated, and brought out as the result: "Do you mind telling me how much she charges you?"

I told him. He looked dejected.

"I can't afford her," he said presently. "No. I can't possibly afford her. Not yet." He paused. "Do you mind giving me her address?"

"I thought you said you couldn't afford her?"

"I can't. Not yet. But I *will* afford her. I will. I give myself another—" He stopped. His mouth fell ajar, and I saw his lips moving as he went through some inaudible calculation—"another six months."

He hid his face in his hands and ran his fingers through his hair. Then, as if he conceived himself to be unobserved behind this shelter, he let himself go; and I became the witness of an agony, a passion, a self-abandoned nakedness, to the utter shedding of all reticences and decencies, with nothing but those thin hands and that hair between me and it.

"I'll work," he said. "I'll work like a hundred bloody niggers. Like ten hundred thousand million sweated tailors in a stinking cellar. I'll pinch. I'll skimp and save. I'll deny myself butter. I'll wear celluloid collars and

sell my dress-suit. My God! I'd sell the coat off my back and the shoes off my feet; I'd sell my own mother's body off her death-bed, and go without my dinner for nine months to see her again for five minutes. Just to see her for five minutes. Five (unprintable) little minutes that another man wouldn't know what to do with, wouldn't use for tying up a bootlace in."

Pause.

"I didn't know it hurt. I didn't know a girl's face could land you one like this, and her eyes jab you, and her voice turn round and round in your stomach like a circular saw. That's what it feels like. Exactly.

"Dry up, you old Geyser, yourself. I'm getting it, not you. *You'd* spout if you'd had to sit tight with all the gas in the shop blazing away under you for the last hour. If you can turn it off at the meter, turn it. I can't. No, I won't have another cup of tea. And I won't get up and clear out, I'm going to sit here another five minutes. I'm not well, I tell you, and it relieves me to talk about it. I don't care if you don't listen. Or if you do. I'm past caring.

"D'you notice that I didn't speak a word to her—not one blessed word the whole time? I should have choked if I'd tried to. I didn't want to look at her, to think of her. That's why I told that rotten story, just to keep myself going. What a blethering idiot she must have thought me! What a putrid ass! The sea—And *me!*

"And the way she looked at me——"

I said, "D'you mean to say, Jevons, it didn't happen?"

And he groaned. "Oh, it *happened* all right. I can't invent things to save my life.

"God! It isn't even as if she was pretty. I could understand *that.*"

He grabbed his throat suddenly and began to cough.

I tried to be kind to him. "Look here," I said, "old chap. I'm awfully sorry if it takes you this way. But it's no good."

He turned on me coughing and choking. I cannot remember all he said or half the things he called me, but it was something like this: "You snivelling defective." (Cough) "You septic idiot." (Cough) "You poisonous and polluted ass." (Cough, cough, cough) "You scarlet imbecile." (I have to water down the increasing richness of his epithets.) "You last diminutive purple embryo of an epileptic stock, do you suppose I don't know that?

"No good? Of course it's no good—yet. I got to wait for another six months. And you can take it from me, if a fellow knows what he wants, and doesn't try to get it—doesn't know how to get it—in six months—and doesn't find out—*he's* no good, if you like."

These words didn't strike me at the time as having any personal application. He was to repeat them later on, however, in circumstances which I defy anybody to have foreseen.

I cannot recall the precise phases of their remarkable friendship. I wasn't present at its earliest stages.

I had my first intimation of its existence one evening in the winter of nineteen-five, when he dropped in on me to consult me, he said, about a rather delicate matter, in which I gathered there lurked for his inexperience the most frightful pitfalls of offence. That he should come to me in this spirit was evidence that a certain chastening had been going on in him.

The delicate matter was this. He had given Miss Thesiger a lot of work, the typing of a whole book, in fact. And—he had immense difficulty in getting to this part of it—she had refused to take any payment. She had got

it into her head that he was hard up. He had sent her a cheque three times, and three times she had returned it. She was as obstinate as a mule about it. And now she was saying that she had never meant him to pay her; she had done the whole thing out of friendship, which, of course, was very pretty of her, but it put him in a beastly position. He'd never been precisely in that position before and he didn't know what to do about it. He didn't want to offend her and yet he didn't see—did I?—how he could let her do it. It was, he said, all the wrong way about, according to his notions. And for the life of him he didn't know what to do. It might seem to me incredible that such virgin innocence as his should exist in a world where the rules for most sorts of conduct were fairly settled. He had lived all his life in an atmosphere of births, marriages and deaths, and he knew all the rules for the registration of them. And that was about all he *did* know. And it was the most infernally hard luck to be stumped like this at the very beginning, just when he wanted most awfully to do the right thing.

Besides, it had knocked him all to bits—the sheer prettiness of it.

He laid bare for me all the curious intricacies of a soul tortured by its own delicacy. There was agony in his eyes.

If he were to take this kindness from a lady—would it, in my opinion, or would it not, be cricket?

I didn't like to tell him that he had brought his agony on himself by his imprudence in employing a typist when he couldn't afford one. So I only said that, if I knew the lady, he would find her uncommonly hard to move.

He hadn't any hope, he said, of moving her; but did I think that if he made her a present—say, the Collected Works of George Meredith, it would meet the case?

I said it would *meet* the case all right, but that in my

opinion it would spoil its prettiness. If Miss Thesiger didn't want to be paid in one way, she wouldn't at all care about being paid in another. Perhaps Miss Thesiger *liked* being pretty. Hadn't he better leave it at that, anyhow, for the present?

You see I looked on Viola and Viola's behaviour as infinitely more my concern than his. I found myself replying for her as she would have wished me to reply, as if I could claim an intenser appreciation of her motives than was his, as if she and I were agreed about this question of helping Tasker Jevons and I were the custodian of her generosity.

He said he supposed it wouldn't hurt him to leave it at that. It wasn't as if it wouldn't be all one in the long run. He gave himself three months.

I supposed he meant to pay her in.

Three weeks later I heard that Jevons was actually living up in Hampstead in the same house as Viola. I didn't hear it from Viola, but from my man, Pavitt, who had it from his sister-in-law. And what Pavitt came to tell me was that Mr. Jevons had been ill.

I went up to Hampstead that afternoon to see him.

I found him in a back room, at the top of the house, sitting by the fire in an easy-chair, wrapped in a blanket. He was as thin as a lath and his face was a bright yellow. The very whites of his eyes were yellow. I would have said you never saw a more miserable object, but that Jevons was not miserable. He was happy. And as far as his devastated condition would allow him, he looked happy. This face, yellow with jaundice, was doing its best to smile. The smile was a grimace, not an affair of the lips at all, but of the deep crescent lines drawn at right angles to them. Still, he was smiling. In a sort of ecstasy.

He was smiling at Viola, who sat in the chair facing

him on the other side of the hearth. She looked as if she had been there for ages. Also, as if she had been sitting up all night.

She was smiling too, straight at Jevons. What I saw was the beatitude of his response.

He tried to smile at me, too, as I came in, but the effort was a failure. He wasn't really a bit glad to see me.

Viola got up and left me with him. I wasn't to stay with him for more than ten minutes, she said. It was the first day he had been allowed to sit up.

I sat with him for fifteen minutes.

He was lodged, as before, in one room; but its domestic character was disguised by many ingenious devices giving you the idea that it was nothing but his study.

Well, there he was, haggard and yellow with jaundice, utterly pitiable as to his appearance and surroundings; and yet he looked at me in, positively, a sort of triumph, as much as to say, "Yes. Here I am. And you, with all your superior resources, haven't managed half so well."

And I thought that he (not knowing Viola so well as I did) was suffering from a lamentable delusion.

He said she had been awfully good to him. But it was rather hard luck on him, wasn't it, that he should have gone and turned this beastly colour?

I said rather loftily I didn't suppose it mattered to Viola what colour he turned.

(What *could* it matter to her?)

She came in presently and took me down to her sitting-room, and gave me tea. She owned to having sat up three nights with Jevons. She couldn't have believed it possible that anybody could be so ill. For three days and three nights the poor thing hadn't been able to keep anything down—not even a drop of water. But to-day she had been feeding him on the whites of eggs beaten up with brandy.

She seemed to me to be obsessed with Jevons's illness, and I made her come out with me for ten minutes for a blow on the Heath. I tried to lead her mind to other things, and she listened politely. Then there was silence, and presently I felt her arm slide into mine (she had these adorable impulses of confidence).

"Furny," she said, "what does jaundice come from?"

I said it generally came from chill.

She frowned, as if she were not satisfied with that explanation. And there was another silence. Then she began again:

"Would being unhappy—very, *very* unhappy—give it you?"

I thought I saw how her mind was working and I advised her to put that idea out of her head. Happiness, I said, wouldn't be good for Jevons.

She said, "Oh, *wouldn't* it!" And, after prolonged meditation, "I wonder if he'll stay that funny yellow colour all his life."

I found out from her that he had been living in that top room above hers for three weeks—ever since he had finished his book. It looked as if he had become frantic when he saw the end of his pretexts and occasions for meeting her, and had cast off all prudence and had followed her, determined to live under the same roof.

I looked on it as a madness that possessed him.

But that it should ever possess *her*—that was inconceivable.

II

He recovered.

The brilliant orange of his jaundice faded to lemon, and the lemon to a sallow tint that cleared rapidly as it was flooded by his flush.

I did not realize then what sources he was drawing on. Looking back on it all, I am amazed at my own stupidity. I was, of course, aware that Viola was sorry for him; but I might have known that a girl's pity was not a stimulant that would keep a man like Jevons going for very long. I am sure he would never have lowered himself by any appeal to it. Why, the bare idea of pity would have been intolerable to him, bursting, as he was, with vitality and invading with the courage and energy and genius of a conqueror a world that was not his.

He laid before me very soon what I can only call his plan of campaign. Journalism with him was a purely defensive operation; but the novel and the short story were his attack. The work that Viola had typed for him was his first novel. He had dug himself in very securely that winter, and each paper that he had occupied and left behind him was a line of trenches that shifted nearer and nearer towards the desired territory. He didn't begin his assault on the public before he had secured his retreat.

I know I am writing about a man whom many people still consider a great novelist and a great playwright. God knows I don't want to disparage him. But to me what he has written matters so little; it has no interest for me ex-

cept as his vehicle, the vehicle in which he arrived; which brought him to his destination quicker perhaps than any other which he could have chosen. His talent was so adroit that he might have chosen almost any other; chance and a happy knack and a habit of observation determined his selection of the written word. Compared with the spectacle of his arrival, what he has written is neither here nor there. What I have written myself is neither here nor there. For the purposes of this history it counts only as the means which enabled me to witness the last act of his drama.

That is why I say so much about his adventure, his campaign, his business, and so little about his books. In this I am adopting his own values, almost his own phrases. He wanted most awfully to arrive. How far he took himself seriously as a writer nobody will ever know. Viola was convinced, and always will be convinced, that he was a great genius. (There's no doubt he traded with her on her conviction. He wanted most awfully to arrive, but more than anything he wanted Viola.) Still, he was too clever, I think, ever to have quite convinced himself.

His adventure, then, began with his reporting; his campaign with his journalism, and his earlier novels; his business was to follow later in the long period of peace and prosperity he saw ahead of him.

His first novel, he told me, was calculated, deliberately, to startle and arrest; to hit the public, rather unpleasantly, in the eye. *That,* he said, was the way to be remembered. It wouldn't sell. He didn't want it to sell. What he wanted first was to gain a position; then to consolidate it; then to build. He talked like the consummate architect of his own fortunes.

His second novel would be designed, deliberately, to counteract the disagreeable effects of his first.

"Why," I asked, "counteract them?"

Because, he said, if he went on being disagreeable, he'd alienate the very sections of the public he most wished to gain. His retirement was simply the preparation for the Grand Attack.

It was in his third novel that he meant, still deliberately, to come into his kingdom and his power and his glory, for ever and ever, Amen. His third novel, he declared, would sell; and it would be his best. On that utterly secure and yet elevated basis he could build afterwards pretty much as he pleased. I asked him if it wasn't a mistake to put his best so early in the series? Wouldn't it be more effective if he worked up to it? But he said No. He'd thought of that. There wasn't anything he hadn't thought of. That third novel was to start his big sales. And the worst of a big sale was this, that when you'd caught your public you were bound to go on giving them the sort of thing you'd caught them with, therefore, he'd be jolly careful to start 'em with the sort of thing he happened to like himself, otherwise he'd have to spend the rest of his life knuckling under to them. He could get a cheaper glory if he chose to try for it; but a cheaper glory wouldn't satisfy him. That was why he decided to make for the highest point he could reach in the beginning, so that his very fallings-off would be glorious and would pay him as no gradual working up and up could possibly be made to pay. Besides, he wanted his glory and his pay quick. He couldn't afford to wait a month longer than his third novel. As for the different quality in the glory it would be years before anybody but himself could tell the difference, and by the time they spotted him he'd be at another game. A game in which he defied anybody to catch him out.

He'd be writing plays.

All this he told me, sitting in an arm-chair in my rooms,

with his feet up on another chair, and smiling, smiling with one side of his mouth while with the other he smoked innumerable cigarettes. I can see his blue eyes twinkle still, through the cigarette smoke that obscured him. That night he had got down to solid business.

It was quite clear that Jevons's business was the business of the speculator who loves the excitement of the risks he takes. I remember exhorting him to prudence. I said: "This isn't art, it's speculation. You're taking considerable risks, my friend."

He took his cigarette out of his mouth, dispersed the smoke, and looked at me very straight and without a twinkle.

"I've got to make money," he said, "and to make it soon. I should be taking worse risks if I didn't."

It's marvellous how he has pulled it off. Just as he said, dates and all. For he named the dates for each stage of his advance.

That was in March; about a week before Easter, nineteen-six.

The next day I went up to Hampstead towards teatime, to see how Viola was getting on. I didn't expect to see Jevons there, for he'd left. He told me in a burst of confidence he'd had to. He couldn't stand it. It was getting too risky. He was living now in rooms in Bernard Street, not far from mine.

At Hampstead I was told that Miss Thesiger was out. She had gone for a walk on the Heath with Mr. Jevons, but they were coming in at half-past four for tea. If I'd step upstairs into the sitting-room I'd find her brother, Captain Thesiger, waiting there.

I stepped upstairs and found Captain Thesiger. I was

glad to find him, for I don't mind owning that by this time I was getting somewhat uneasy about Viola.

It was all very well for Viola to nurse Jevons through his jaundice, she might have done that out of pure humanity; but she had no business to be going for walks with the little bounder. Even the charm of his conversation and his personality (and it *had* a charm) couldn't conceal the fact that he was a little bounder. Why, in moments of excitement he had gestures that must have made her shudder all down her spine, and more than once I have known his aitches become fugitive, though, on the whole, I must say he was pretty careful. And Viola was letting herself in for him. In sheer innocence and recklessness she was letting herself in. I felt that if ever it should come to getting her out I would be glad of an ally. Now that I saw what Viola was capable of, I began to feel some sympathy with her people at Canterbury who had tried so ineffectually to hold her in.

There was nothing ineffectual about Reggie Thesiger. I suppose he would have been impressive anyway from the sheer height and breadth of him, his visible and palpable perfection; but what "had" me was not his perfection, but the odd likeness to his sister which he combined, and in some mysterious way reconciled, with it. His face had taken over not only the dominant and defiant look of hers, exaggerated by his sheer virility; but it had the very tricks of her charm, even to the uptilted lines of her mouth; his little black moustache followed and gave accent to them. I said to myself: "Here is a young man who will not stand any nonsense."

He greeted me with a joy that I could not account for all at once in an entire stranger, and it was mixed with a childlike and candid surprise. I wondered what I had done that he should be so glad to see me.

His manner very soon left me in no doubt as to what I had done. I had brought the most intense relief to the Captain's innocent mind. I do not know by what subtle shades he managed to convey to me that, compared with the queer chap I so easily might have been, he found me distinctly agreeable. It was obvious that I existed for him only as the chap, the strange and legendary chap, that Viola had taken up with, and that in this capacity he, to his own amazement, approved of me. I gathered that, knowing his sister, he had feared the worst, and that the blessed relief of it was more than he could bear if he didn't let himself go a bit.

He had quite evidently come, or had been sent, to see what Viola was up to. Possibly he may have had in his mind the extraordinary treatment I had received from his father, and he may have been anxious to atone.

Any relief that I might have brought to Captain Thesiger was surpassed by the reassurance that I took from my first sight of him. It was as if I had instantly argued to myself: "This is the sort of thing that has produced Viola. This is the sort of man she has been brought up with. When Viola thinks of men it is this sort of man she is thinking of. It is therefore inconceivable that Tasker Jevons should exist for her otherwise than as a curious intellectual freak. Even *her* perversity couldn't—no, it could *not*—fall so far from this familiar perfection." Though Captain Thesiger's perfection might not help me personally, it did dispose of little Jevons. Looking at him, I felt as if my uneasiness, you may say my jealousy, of Jevons (it almost amounted to that) had been an abominable insult to his sister.

Reggie—he is my brother-in-law now, and I cannot go on calling him Captain Thesiger—Reggie was good enough to say that he had heard of me from his sister. His voice

conveyed, without any vulgar implication, an acknowledgment of my right to be heard of from her—but, of course, he went on agreeably, he had heard of me in any case; he supposed everybody had. My celebrity was so immature that I should not have recognized this allusion to it if Reggie had not gone on even more genially. He said he liked awfully the things I did in the *Morning Standard.* Most especially and enthusiastically he liked my account of the big boxing match at Olympia. You could see it was written by a chap who knew what he was talking about.

I had to confess that Tasker Jevons was the chap who wrote it. Reggie, quite prettily abashed, tried to recover himself and plunged further. He brought up from his memory one thing after another. And all his reminiscences were of Jevons. He had mixed us up hopelessly, as people did in those days. They knew I was associated with the *Morning Standard,* and that was all they knew about me; if they wanted to recall anything striking I had done, it was always Jevons they remembered. Poor Reggie was so inveterate in his blundering that after his fourth desperate effort he gave it up. His memory, he said, was rotten.

I said, on the contrary, his memory for Jevons was perfect, and he looked at me charmingly and laughed.

While he was laughing Viola came in. She had Jevons with her.

It was evident that neither of them was prepared for Reggie Thesiger. They had let themselves in with a latchkey and come straight upstairs without encountering Mrs. Pavitt.

At the sight of her brother Viola betrayed a feeling I should not have believed possible to her. For the first and I may say the last, time in my experience of her, I saw Viola show funk.

It was the merest tremor of her tilted mouth, the flicker of an eyelash, an almost invisible veiling of her brilliant eyes; I do not think it would have been perceptible to anybody who watched her with a less tense anxiety than mine. But it was there, and it hurt me to see it.

There was one person, only one person, in the world whom Viola was afraid of, and that was her brother Reggie. She was afraid of him because she loved him. He was the person in the world that she loved best, before—before the catastrophe. And this fear of hers that I alone saw (Reggie most certainly had not seen it) ought to have warned me if nothing else had.

It probably would have warned me but for what she did next; but for her whole subsequent behaviour.

She broke loose from Reggie, who had closed on her with a shout of "Hallo, Vee-Vee!" and an embrace; she broke loose from Reggie and turned to me, all laughing and rosy from his impact, with an outstretched hand and a voice that swept to me and rippled with a sort of nervous joy. And she said: "Oh, Wally, this *is* nice of you! You'll stop for tea."

Her mouth said that. But her eyes—they had grown suddenly pathetic—said a lot more. They said: "Don't go, Wally, *please* don't go. Whatever you do, don't leave me alone with him." At least, I can see now that that's what they were saying. And even at the time I saw on her dear face the same blessed relief (at finding me there) that I had seen on Reggie's.

Neither Reggie nor I, mind you, had seen Jevons yet (I am speaking of fractions of seconds of time); and he wasn't actually in the room; but Viola and I were aware of him outside. If he had not paused on the landing to dispose of his overcoat and his hat and his stick, their entrance would have been simultaneous.

That pause saved them.

His stick slipped and tumbled down on the landing with a clatter. We heard him prop it up again. Our eyes met. I'm afraid mine said: "What are you going to do *now?*"

Then he came in and I saw the gallant Reggie take the shock of him. I don't suppose he had ever before met anything like Jevons—I mean really met him, at close quarters—in his life. But he *was* gallant, and he had his face well under control. Only the remotest, vanishing quiver and twinkle betrayed the extremity of his astonishment.

Viola, with an admirable air of detachment from Jevons, introduced them. I don't know how she did it. It was as if, without any actual repudiation, she declined to hold herself responsible for Jevons' appearance; for the extraordinary little bow he made; for his jerky aplomb and for his "Glad to meet you, Captain." And for the rest, she just handed him over to her brother and trusted Reggie to be decent to him.

I had wondered: Are they going to let on that they've been out together? She cannot—she cannot own up to that. But how are they going to get out of it, and will he betray her?

I saw how they were going to get out of it. If they didn't say in as many words that they'd met on the doorstep they implied it in everything they said. They asked each other polite questions, all to the tune of: "What have you been doing since I last saw you?"—to convey the impression that they had met thus casually after a long interval. Jevons played up to her well, almost too well; so well, in fact, did he play, that not long afterwards I was to ask myself: Was this perfection the result of collusion? Had they anticipated just such a sudden, disconcerting encounter? Had they thought it all out and

arranged with each other beforehand how they should behave? I don't know. I never cared to ask her.

The game lasted some little time. I didn't like to see her driven to these shifts (I was afraid, in fact, they'd overdo it), and I came to her help by telling Jevons that Captain Thesiger was an enthusiastic admirer of his work; and Reggie burst in jubilantly—he was evidently glad to be able to meet Jevons on this happy ground—with: "Are you the chap who wrote those things I've been reading? I say, Vee-Vee, you might have told me."

He fastened upon Jevons then and there. He started him off on the boxing match. There was very little about boxing that Reggie didn't know, but he appealed to Jevons with a charming deference as to an expert. The dear boy had a good deal of his sister's innocent veneration for the chaps who wrote the things they'd been reading, who could, that is to say, do something they couldn't do.

And Jevons, once started on the boxing match, fairly let himself go. He careered over the field of sport, interrupting his own serious professional *élan* with all sorts of childlike and spontaneous gambols. In some of his turns he was entirely lovable. It was clear that Reggie loved him as you love a strange little animal at play, or any vital object that diverts you. From his manner I gathered that, provided he were not committed to closer acquaintance with Jevons, he was willing enough to snatch the passing joy of him.

I do not know by what transitions they slid together on to the Boer War. The Boer War happened to be Reggie's own ground. He had served in it. You would have said that Jevons had served in it too, to hear him. He traced the course of the entire campaign for Reggie's benefit. He showed him by what error each regrettable inci-

dent (as they called them then) had occurred, and by what strategy it might have been prevented.

And Reggie—who had been there—listened respectfully to Jevons.

Viola had lured me into a corner where only scraps of their conversation reached us from time to time. So I do not know whether it was in connection with the Boer War that Jevons began telling Reggie that journalism was a rotten game; that from birth he had been baulked of his ambition. He had wanted to be tall and handsome. He had wanted to be valorous and athletic. And here he was sent into the world undersized and not even passably good-looking. And what—he asked Reggie—*could* he do with a physique like his?

I remember Reggie telling Jevons his physique didn't matter a hang. He could be a war correspondent in the next war. I remember Jevons saying in an awful voice: That was just it. He couldn't be anything in the next war—and, by God, there was a big war coming—he gave it eight years—but he couldn't be in it. He was an arrant coward.

That, he said, was his tragedy. His cowardice—his distaste for danger—his certainty that if any danger were ever to come near him he would funk.

And I remember Reggie saying, "My dear fellow, if you've the courage to say so——" and Jevons beating off this consolation with a funny gesture of despair. And then his silence.

It was as if suddenly, in the midst of his gambolling, little Jevons had fallen into an abyss. He sat there, at the bottom of the pit, staring at us in the misery of the damned.

I looked at Viola. Her eyelids drooped; her head

drooped. Her whole body drooped under the affliction of his stare, and she would not look at me.

Reggie (he really *was* decent) tried to turn it off. "I wouldn't worry, if I were you," he said. "Wait till the war comes."

"Oh, it's coming all right," said little Jevons. "No fear."

And as if he could no longer bear to contemplate his cowardice, he said good-bye to us and left. Reggie's eyes followed his dejected, retreating figure.

"How quaint!" he said. "But he's a smart chap, anyway. And, mind you, he's right about that war."

I said (Heaven knows why, except that I think I must have wanted Reggie's opinion of Jevons): "D'you think he's right about his own cowardice?"

Reggie said, "Ask me another. You can't tell. I only know I've seen men look like that and talk like that before an engagement."

Viola raised her head. Her voice came with the clear tremor of a bell: "And did they funk?"

"They didn't run away, if that's what you mean. I daresay they felt like Jevons. I've felt like Jevons myself."

Of course, knowing Jevons as I do now, I have sometimes fancied his talk about cowardice may have been mere bravado, the risk he took with Reggie. But here again I am not quite sure. I don't really know.

I am, however, entirely enlightened as to the game Viola played with me that night.

Jevons had stayed till half-past six. He had talked for two hours and a half. When I got up to go, Reggie suggested that his sister should come and dine with him somewhere in town and do a play afterwards.

She said, All right. She was on. And Furny would come too.

He said, of course I was coming too. That was what he had meant (it wasn't).

And in the end I went. I say in the end—for of course I protested. It was his one evening with his sister. But Viola's poor eyes signalled to me and implored me: "Don't leave me alone with him, whatever you do." She wanted to put off the dreadful moment that must come when he would ask her: "Where on earth did you pick up that shocking little bounder?"

But the question never came. To begin with, Reggie was so enthralled by the funny play we went to that he forgot all about Jevons. And then Viola's game, that started in the restaurant and went on all through dinner, began again and continued in the taxi after the play. And though Reggie was discretion itself, you could see that he had taken it for granted—and no wonder—that she and I were, well, on the brink of an engagement if we hadn't fallen in. As for Jevons, he simply couldn't have conceived him in that connection. To Reggie Jevons was simply an amusing little scallywag who could write. That Viola should have taken Jevons seriously surpassed his imagination of the possible. So that she never was in any danger of discovery, and there was no need for her manœuvres. He couldn't have so much as found out that she had gone for a walk with Jevons, because it wouldn't have entered his head that you could go for a walk with him. People didn't do these things.

Besides, he never was alone with her that evening. She took good care of that. She insisted on dropping him at his hotel, which we passed on our way northwards. She actually said to him, "You must get out here. Furny'll see me home. I want to talk to him."

And instead of talking to me, she sat leaning forward with her back half turned to me, staring through the window at nothing at all.

That was how I came to propose to Viola in the taxi. I had been afraid to do it before. I wasn't going to do it at all unless I was sure of her. But it seemed to me that she had been trying all afternoon and all evening to tell me that I might be sure.

Well—she wouldn't have me. She was most decided about it. I had no hope and no defence and no appeal from her decision. Unless I was prepared to be a bounder —and a fatuous bounder at that—I couldn't tell her that she had given me encouragement that almost amounted to invitation. To do her justice, until the dreadful moment in the taxi she hadn't known that she had given me anything. She confessed that she had been trying to convey to Reggie the impression that if her affections were engaged in any quarter it was in mine. She had been so absorbed in calculating the effect on Reggie that she had never considered the effect on me. She said she thought I knew what she was up to and that I was simply seeing her through. She spoke of Jevons as if he was a joke—a joke that might be disastrous if her family took it seriously. It might end in her recall from town. She intimated that there were limits even to Reggie's enjoyment of the absurd; she owned quite frankly that she was afraid of Reggie—afraid of what he might think of her and say to her; because, she said, she was so awfully fond of him. As for me, and what *I* might think, it was open to me to regard her solitary stroll with Jevons as a funny escapade.

I do not believe the poor child was trying to throw dust in my eyes. It was her own eyes she was throwing dust

in. She didn't want to think of herself what she was afraid of Reggie thinking.

As to the grounds of my rejection (I was determined to know them), she was clear enough in her own little mind. She liked me; she liked me immensely; she liked me better than anybody in the world but Reggie. She admired me; she admired everything I did; she thought me handsome; I was the nicest-looking man she knew, next to Reggie. But she didn't love me.

"What's more, Furny," she said, "I can't think why I don't love you."

I couldn't see her clearly and continuously in the taxi. The lamp-posts we passed on the way to Hampstead lit her up at short, regular intervals, and at short, regular intervals she faded and was withdrawn from me. And in the same intermittent way, her soul, as she was trying to show it to me, was illuminated and withdrawn.

"I ought to love you," she went on. "I know I ought. It would be the very best thing I could do."

The folly in me clutched at that admission and gave tongue. "If that's so," I said, "don't you think you could try to do what you ought?"

The lamp-light fell on her then. She was smiling a little sad, wise smile. "No," she said. "No. I think that's *why* I can't love you—because I ought."

And then she went on to explain that what she had against me was my frightful rectitude.

"You're too nice for me, Furny, much too nice. And ever so much too good. I simply couldn't live with integrity like yours." She paused and then turned to me full as we passed a lamp-post.

"I suppose you know my people would like me to marry you?"

I said a little irritably that I had no reason to suppose anything of the sort.

"They would," she said. "Why, bless you, that's what they asked you down at Whitsuntide for! I don't mean that they said to each other: Let's ask him down and then he'll marry Viola. They wouldn't even think it—they're much too nice. Poor dears—they'd be horrified if they knew I knew it! But it was underneath their minds, you know, pushing them on all the time. I believe they sent Reggie up to have a look at you, though they don't know that either. They think they sent him to see what I was up to. You see, Furny dear, from their point of view you *are* so eligible. And really, do you know, I think that's what's dished you—what's dished us both, if you like to put it that way. I'm sure you may."

I said it didn't matter much what dished me or how I put it, provided I *was* dished. But—was I?

Oh yes! She left me in no doubt that I was dished. And I saw—I still see, and if anything more clearly—why.

I was everything that Canterbury approved of. And Viola, in her young revolt, was up against everything of which Canterbury approved. Her people were dear people; they were charming people, well-bred people; they had unbroken traditions of beautiful behaviour. And they had tied her up too tight in their traditions; that was all. Viola would never marry anybody on whom Canterbury had set its seal.

And seeing all that, I saw that I had missed her by a mere accident. It was my friend the General who had dished me when he testified to my entire eligibility. That's to say, it was my own fault. If I had let well alone; if I hadn't turned the General on to them, *I* should have been in the highest degree ineligible; *I* should have been a person of whom Canterbury most severely disapproved; when

I've no doubt that Viola, out of sheer perversity, would have insisted on marrying me.

She said as much. So far she saw into herself and no farther.

The Northern Heights were favourable to this interview, for the taxi broke down in an attempt to scale East Heath Road, so that we walked the last few hundred yards together to her door.

It was while we were walking that—stung by a sudden fear, a reminiscence of the afternoon—I asked her: Was there anybody else?

No, she said, there wasn't. How could there be? Hadn't she told me she liked me better than anybody else, next to Reggie?

"Are you sure?" I said. "Are you quite sure?"

She stopped in the middle of the road and looked at me.

"Of course," she said. "There *isn't* anybody. Except poor, funny little Jevons. And you couldn't mean him."

That was as near as we got to him then.

But a week later—the week before Easter—he came to us suddenly in my rooms where Viola was correcting proofs for me.

He had come to tell us of his good luck. His novel had been accepted.

I was glad, of course. But Viola was more than glad. She was excited, agitated. She jumped up and said: "Oh, Jimmy!" (She called him Jimmy, and her voice told me that it was not for the first time.) "Jimmy! How simply spiffing!"

And I saw him look at her with a grave and tender assurance, as a man looks at the woman he loves when he knows that the hour of his triumph is her hour.

And I thought even then: It's nothing. It's only that she's glad the poor chap has pulled it off.

Then she said: "Let's all go and dine somewhere together. You don't mind, Furny dear, do you? I'll take it home and sit up with it."

Oh, I didn't mind. We all went somewhere and dined together. We went, for the sheer appropriateness of it, to that restaurant in Soho where I had dined with Jevons for the first time. That was how it happened—what did happen, I mean, afterwards, in my rooms where Jevons had left us.

We had gone back there for coffee and cigarettes. (Canterbury wouldn't have approved of this.)

He had said good night to us when he turned on the threshold with his reminiscence. The restaurant in Soho had aroused it.

"I say, Furnival, do you remember that half-crown you borrowed from me?"

I said I did. And that to remind me of it now was a joke in very questionable taste.

He said, "You never really knew the joke. I kept it from you most carefully. That little orgy of ours had just about cleared me out and the half-crown was my last half-crown. I had to go without any dinner for three days."

I mumbled something about his not meaning it.

He said, "Of course I meant it. Why, my dear chap, that's the joke!"

He stood there in the doorway, rocking with laughter. Then he saw our faces.

"I say, I wouldn't have told you if I'd thought it would harrow you like that. Thought you'd think it funny. It *is* funny."

I said, "No, my dear fellow, it's just missed being funny."

I put my hand on his shoulder and pushed him from the room. (I had seen Viola's face and I didn't want him to see it.) I led him gently downstairs with a hand still on his shoulder. He was a little grieved at giving pain when he had hoped to give pleasure.

At the bottom of the stairs he turned and looked at me with his ungovernable twinkle. "It *was* funny," he said. "But it wasn't half so funny, Furnival, as your face."

I found Viola sitting at my writing-table, with her arms flung out over it and her head bowed on them. And she was crying—crying with little soft sobs. I've said that I didn't think she could do it. And I didn't. She wasn't the sort that cries. I'm convinced she hadn't cried like this for years, perhaps never since she was a child.

I put my arms round her as if she had been a child; I held her soft, warm, quivering body close to mine; I wiped her tears away with her pocket-handkerchief. And like a child she abandoned herself to my—to my rectitude. She trusted in it utterly. I might have been her brother Reggie.

I said: "You mustn't mind. He was only rotting us." And she said: "He wasn't. It was true. He told me that six months ago he was starving."

I said: "Vee-Vee, if he *was,* you mustn't think about him. You mustn't, really."

Then she drew away from me and dried her eyes herself, carefully and efficiently, and said in a calm and measured voice: "I'm not thinking about him."

I went on as if I hadn't heard her: "You mustn't be sorry for him. Jevons is quite clever enough to take care

of himself. He isn't a bit pathetic. You mustn't let him get at you that way."

She raised her head with her old, high defiance. "He isn't trying to get at me. I'm not sorry for him—any more than he's sorry for himself."

I said, "You don't know. You're just a dear little ostrich hiding its head in the sand."

"No," she said. "No. I'm not a fool, Furny. Even an ostrich isn't such a fool as it looks. It doesn't imagine for a moment that it isn't seen. It hides its head because it knows it's going to be caught, anyway, and it's afraid of seeing what's going to catch it."

I asked her then, Was *she* afraid?

She was standing beside me now, leaning back against my writing-table. Her two hands clutched the edge of it. Her eyes had a far-seeing, candid gaze.

"I'm not afraid," she said, "of anything outside me. Only of things inside me—sometimes."

"What sort of things?"

She smiled, the queerest little, far-off smile.

"Oh, funny things—things you wouldn't understand, Furny."

To that I said, "I wish you'd marry me, Viola."

She shrugged her shoulders and said, so did she, and it was much worse for her than it was for me. And then: "Do you know, Reggie liked you immensely. He told me so."

I said it would be more to the point if *she* did. But since she didn't, since she couldn't marry me, I wished—"I wish," I said, "you'd go back to Canterbury and marry some nice man like Reggie."

"Can't you see," she cried, "that I shall never marry a nice man like Reggie?"

III

The next thing that happened was that she went off with Jevons.

At least, to all appearances she went off with him. They were in Belgium, at Bruges and Antwerp and Ghent and Bruges again together. I found them at Bruges after having tracked them through all the other places.

It was Captain Thesiger who started me. Reggie (whose family seemed to employ him chiefly to find out what Viola was up to) had called at my rooms after Easter to ask me if I could give him his sister's address. He said they hadn't got it at Hampstead, where he had been to see her, and they didn't know where she was staying. They thought it was in the country somewhere, and that she wouldn't be very long away, as she told them not to forward any letters. He thought I might possibly have her address.

I told him that I hadn't, and that I didn't know how to get it, either.

He said, "It's a rotten habit she's got of sloping off like this without telling you." It wouldn't matter, only his regiment was ordered off to India. He was sailing next week. She was to have come down to Canterbury for Easter and she hadn't. If he only knew the people she was stopping with—if he'd any idea of the town or the village or the county, he'd try and find her. But she might be in the Hebrides for all he knew.

I said I was sorry I couldn't help. All I knew was

she had gone into the country (I didn't know it, but I assumed the knowledge for her protection). She had told me she might be going (she had), and I didn't think she'd be away for more than a day or two. I was pretty sure she'd be back before he sailed.

I'd no reason, you see, to suppose she wouldn't be. Anyhow, I satisfied him.

I marvel now at the ease with which I did it. But he was used to Viola's casual behaviour; and the monstrous improbability of the thing she had done this time was her cover. Who in the world would have dreamed that she would go off with Jevons? I don't really know that I dreamed it myself at the moment. I may be mixing up with my first vague dread the certainty that came later. But sometimes I wonder why Reggie didn't suspect *me*. I suppose my rectitude that had dished me with Viola saved me with her brother.

He took me to lunch with him at his club, and went off quite happily afterwards to the Army and Navy Stores to see about his kit.

I went straight to Jevons's rooms in Bernard Street. Jevons was away. Had been away since Easter. His landlady couldn't give me his address. He hadn't told them where he was going to, and they rather thought he was abroad. His letters were all forwarded to his publishers. *They* might give me his address.

I went to his publishers. They wouldn't give me his address. They weren't allowed to give addresses, but they would forward any letters to Mr. Jevons. I said I was a friend of Mr. Jevons's. Could they at least tell me whether he was or was not in England? They said that when they had last heard from him he was not.

Then I went down to Fleet Street, to his editor, my editor. He couldn't give me Jevons's address because he

hadn't got it. He rang up the office. In the office they rather thought Jevons was in Belgium. They'd had a manuscript from him posted at Ostend. They looked up the date. It was three days ago.

I sailed that night for Ostend.

Of course I had no business to follow Jevons. He had a perfect right to travel—to travel anywhere he liked, without interference from anybody. And in fixing on a time to travel in, nothing was more likely than with his mania upon him he would choose a time that had become valueless to him—a time that he had no other use for, the time when Viola Thesiger was away. The poverty of his resources was such that he couldn't afford to waste any opportunity of seeing her. So that I really could not have given any satisfactory answer if I had been asked why I had jumped to the preposterous conclusion that, because they were away at the same time, they were away together. It ought to have been as inconceivable to me as it was to Reggie. I can only say that in following him I acted on an intimation that amounted to certainty, founded on I know not what underground flashes of illumination and secret fear.

I must have trusted to more flashes in pursing his trail. For when I reached Folkestone there wasn't any trail at all. My only clue was that three days ago Jevons had posted a manuscript at Ostend. He might not be in Belgium at all. He might be in Holland or in France or Germany by this time.

When we got to Ostend I made systematic inquiries at the Post Office and at all probable hotels. At the eleventh hotel (a very humble one) I heard that a "Mr. Chevons" had stayed there one night, three nights ago. No, he had nobody with him. He had left no address. They didn't know where he was going on to. I found out under another

rubric that Englishmen never came to this hotel. There was no point in making a separate search for Viola; if my intuition held good, all I had to do was to find out where Jevons was.

I went on to Bruges. Why, I cannot tell you. I had never heard either Viola or Jevons say they would like to see Bruges. But Bruges was the sort of place that people did like to see.

No trace of Jevons or of Viola in Bruges.

I went on to Antwerp (it was another of the likely places), and then, in sheer desperation, to Ghent.

And in Ghent, in a certain hotel in the *Place d'Armes,* I ran up against Burton Withers, the man who used to be on the old *Dispatch,* and the very last person I could have wished to see. I didn't ask him if he'd seen Jevons; I didn't mention Jevons; but before we'd parted he had told me that, by the way, he'd come across Jevons in Bruges. He was going about with my typist, Miss Thesiger. They were staying in the same hotel.

I tried to say as casually as I could that Miss Thesiger had wired to me that she was staying in that hotel with her people.

The little bounder then intimated that when he saw Miss Thesiger her people were less conspicuous than Jevons.

I replied that that was probably the reason why they'd asked me to join them when I'd seen Ghent.

Withers advised me to go on seeing Ghent if I wanted to be popular. They—Jevons and Miss Thesiger—didn't look at all as if they wanted to be seen, much less joined.

He had the air of knowing a good deal more than he cared to tell me; but then he always had that air; you may say he lived on it.

I asked him presently (in a suitable context) whether

he was going back soon; and to my relief I learned that he had only just come out—for his paper—and was going on into Germany through Brussels. He wouldn't be back in England for another three weeks or more.

He wouldn't be back, I reflected, to tell what he knew or what he didn't know, till Reggie Thesiger had sailed.

I got rid of the little beast on the first likely pretext, having dealt with him so urbanely that he couldn't possibly think he had told me anything I saw reason to believe and therefore to resent.

Then I went back to Bruges.

This time my quest was fairly easy. I didn't know what hotel Jevons was staying in; but I did know the sort of hotel that Withers stayed in when he was travelling for his paper. My errand was narrowed down to three or four (good, but not too good), and the first I struck in the Market-Place was Withers's hotel. It was one of those that three days ago had known nothing of Jevons.

I inquired this time for Withers and was told that he had left that morning. I engaged a room and strolled out into the Market-Place. I visited the Cathedral, the Belfry, and the Béguinage, in the hope of coming suddenly across Viola and Jevons.

I did not come across them in any of those places; but I was not very earnest about the search. I was so sure that if Withers had not lied to me they would presently come across me at their hotel. I meant that it should be that way, if possible: that they should come across me in a place where they could not evade me. God only knows what I meant to say to them when they had found me.

As I entered the hotel again I saw the proprietor's wife make a sign to her husband. They conferred together, and sent the *concierge* upstairs after me. He wanted to know if I was the gentleman who had inquired the other day

for Mr. Chevons, because, if I was, Mr. Chevons had arrived the day before yesterday and was staying in the hotel.

There was no doubt about it; his name, James Tasker Jevons, was in the visitors' list.

Viola's was not.

From the enthusiasm of the fat proprietor and his wife you would have supposed that Jevons and I had roamed the habitable globe for months in search of one another; and that Jevons, at any rate, would be overpowered with joy when he found that I was here. They said nothing about Viola.

And before I could ask myself what earthly motive Withers could have had for lying to me, I concluded that he *had* lied.

Or perhaps—it was more than likely—he had been mistaken.

Jevons, I said to myself, was bound to turn up at dinner. If Viola was in Bruges, Viola would probably be with him. I chose a table by the door behind a screen, where I could see everybody as they came in without being seen first of all by anybody.

Jevons didn't turn up for dinner.

I found him later on in the evening, on the bridge outside the eastern gate of the city. He stood motionless and alone, leaning over the parapet and looking into the water. Away beyond the Canal a long dyke of mist dammed back the flooding moonlight, and the things around Jevons—the trees, the water, the bridge, the gate and its twin turrets—were indistinct. But the man was so poured out and emptied into his posture that I could see his dejection, his despair. The posture ought to have disarmed me, but it didn't.

He moved away as he saw me coming, then, recognizing

me, he stood his ground. It was as if almost he were relieved to see me.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said.

I asked him who he thought it was, and he said he thought it was that little beast Withers.

I said, "I daresay you did. I saw Withers this morning."

He said quite calmly he supposed that was why I was here.

I said I had been here before I had seen Withers.

"I see," he said. "He's told you."

I said Withers had told me nothing I didn't know.

"You didn't know anything," he said. "You simply came here to find out."

I said: Yes, that was what I had come for.

"Well," he went on; "there isn't much to find out. She's here. And I'm here. And Withers saw us yesterday. As he told you."

He spoke in the tired, toneless voice of a man stating for the thirty-first time an obvious and uninteresting fact. He knew that I had tracked him down, but he didn't resent it. I felt more than ever that this encounter was in some way a relief to him; things, he almost intimated, might have been so much worse. I didn't know then that his calmness was the measure of his trust in me.

"The really beastly thing," he said, "was Withers seeing us."

I answered that the really beastly thing was his being there; his having brought her there; and that it would give me pleasure to pitch him over the canal bridge, only that the canal water was too clean for him.

He said, "The canal water is filthy. But it isn't filthier than—it isn't half so filthy as your imagination. Your imagination, Furnival, is like the main sewer of this city."

He said it without any sort of passion, in his voice of utter weariness, as if he was worn-out with struggling against imaginations such as mine.

"But," he went on, "even your imagination isn't as obscene as Withers's. You may as well tell me what he said to you about Miss Thesiger."

"He said that she—that you were staying together in the same hotel."

"Why shouldn't we? It's a pretty big hotel. Do you mind my going back to it?"

I said grimly that I was going back to it myself. I wasn't going to let Jevons out of my sight. I felt as if I had taken him into custody.

We went back.

We didn't speak till we came into the Market-Place. Then Jevons said quietly:

"As it happens, we aren't staying together in that damned hotel. I'm staying in it by myself. We were dining there and having breakfast when Withers spotted us. You don't suppose she'd let me take her to the same hotel, do you? I got a room for her in a boarding-house. Kept by some ladies."

"What do you mean by bringing her here at all? If," I said, "you *did* bring her."

He meditated as if he too wondered what he had meant by it.

"I brought her all right. That's to say, I made her come."

"You mean you didn't bring her? She followed you?"

(I *had* to know what they had done, how they had arranged it.)

We stood for a moment in the middle of the vast foreign Market-Place, talking in voices whose softness veiled our hostility.

He answered with a little spurt of anger. "You can't call it following. She came."

"Don't prevaricate," I said. "She came because you made her come. I'm not going to ask you why you made her. It's obvious."

"Is it?" he said. "I wish I knew why. I wish to God I knew."

"Don't talk rot," I said. "You knew all right. And she didn't."

He looked at me. Standing there in the lighted Market-Place, under the shadow of the monument, he looked at me with shining, tragic eyes.

"No, Furnival," he said. "Before God I didn't know. Neither of us knew. But I know now. And I'm going to-morrow."

He stuck to it that he was going. He seemed to think that his going would make it all right. He had just realized—he had only just, after six days of it, mind you, realized—that he had compromised her. I said I supposed he realized it after Withers had seen them?

He said, No, it had come over him before that. Neither of them really cared a damn about Withers. Who was going to care what a beast like Withers thought or said? It had come over him that he oughtn't to have brought her here. He wished he'd hung himself before he'd thought of it, but the fact was that he didn't think. He just felt when he got out here himself that it would be a jolly thing for her to come too; it would do her good to cut everything—all the mimsy tosh she'd been brought up in and hated—to get out of it all—just to do one splendid bunk. That, he said, was all it amounted to.

We talked it over, sitting up in his little bedroom under the roof, the cheapest room in the hotel. You may wonder

how I could have endured to talk to him instead of wringing his horrid little neck for him; but there wasn't anything else to be done. After all, it wouldn't have done Viola or me any good if I had wrung his neck. It was, in fact, to save precisely that sort of violent scandal that I had come out here. I had realized so well what wringing Jevons's neck would mean to Viola that I was determined to get at him before Reggie Thesiger could.

Besides I doubt very much if you could have wrung the neck of anybody so abjectly penitent as Jevons was that evening. I felt as if I were shut up with a criminal in the condemned cell, and Jevons no doubt felt as if he had murdered Viola.

And yet, sitting there on his bed, leaning forward with his head in his hands and his eyes staring, staring at the horror he had raised round her, he asserted persistently his innocence.

"Practically," he said, "I brought her out to look at Bruges—the Belfry."

I said: "Good God! Couldn't she look at the Belfry without *you?*"

He shook his head and replied very gravely: "Not in the same way, Furnival. Not in the same way. It wouldn't have been the same thing at all."

"You mean it wouldn't have been the same for you, you little bounder."

"It wouldn't have been the same thing for *her*. I wasn't thinking only of myself. Who does?"

It was as if he had said: "Who that loves as I love thinks only of himself?" But I missed that. I was too angry.

At least I suppose I was too angry. I must have been. Jevons's offence was unspeakable, or seemed so. He had outraged all decencies. He had done *me* about the worst

injury that one man can do to another—at any rate, I wasn't sure that he hadn't. How could I have been sure? Every appearance was against him. Even his funny candour left me with a ghastly doubt. It was preposterous, his candour. His innocence was preposterous. But it is impossible to write about this singular adventure as it must have appeared to me at the time. I am saturated with Jevons's point of view. I have had to live so long with his innocence and I have forgiven him so thoroughly any wrong he ever did to me. All this is bound to colour my record and confuse me. I have impression upon impression of Jevons piled in my memory; I cannot dig down deep enough to recover the original; I cannot get back to that anger of mine, that passion of violent integrity, that simple abhorrence of Jevons that I must have felt.

He didn't care a rap about me and my abhorrence. He asked me what I thought I was doing when I came out here? He simply smiled when I told him I'd come out to send Viola back to her people before Reggie Thesiger got hold of him and thrashed him within an inch of his life, not because I in the least objected to his being thrashed within an inch of his life—far from it—but because advertisement in these affairs was undesirable. I didn't want Viola's family or anybody else to know about this instance. It was to be hushed up on her account and on their account alone.

He replied pensively (almost too pensively) that he had supposed that was the line I would take. It was his little meditative pose that made me call him a thundering scallywag and accuse him of having calculated on the line that would be taken.

He said quietly, "The word thundering is singularly inappropriate. There's nothing thundering about me. I haven't calculated anything. As for hushing it up, I'm

hushing it up myself, thank you. Haven't I told you I'm going to-morrow? Can't you see that I'm packing?"

He had evidently been trying to pack.

"And what," I asked, "is Miss Thesiger doing?"

"She's staying on here by herself a bit. In the *pension*. As if she'd come by herself."

He seemed entirely satisfied with his plan.

I said, "Look here, Jevons, that won't do. It's no good *your* going. You've been seen here. You're supposed to be staying in this hotel together. If you go and she stays—in that *pension*—you've deserted her. You've seduced her. You're tired of her—in five days—and you've left her."

"You don't suppose I have *really?*" said Jevons.

"I don't suppose anything. I don't know what you've done. I don't think I want to know. That's what it'll look like. Do, for God's sake, remember you've been *seen.*"

He gathered a portion of his cheek into his mouth and sucked it.

"I suppose," he said, "it *would* look like that."

I said of course it would. And he asked me then, quite humbly, what I thought he'd better do.

I said I thought he'd better do exactly what I told him. He was to stay here till Captain Thesiger had sailed for India (I wasn't going to let him get back to England till Reggie was out of it). Miss Thesiger was to go back to her people to-morrow, and he was not to see her or write to her before she went.

He asked me was I thinking of taking her back myself?

I said I wasn't. Miss Thesiger had behaved as if she had disappeared. There was no good in my behaving as if she had disappeared with *me*.

That seemed to pacify him.

I said I should take her to Ostend to-morrow and put her on board the boat. I could see that he didn't at all care about this part of the programme, but his intelligence accepted the whole as the best thing that could be done in the circumstances.

Then I left him to his misery and went round to the *pension* to see Viola.

All my instincts revolted against what I had to do.

She has since told me that I did it beautifully. I don't, of course, believe her, and it doesn't matter. The wonder is how I did it at all.

To begin with I was afraid of seeing her, because I conceived that she would be afraid of seeing me. I felt as if I had hunted her down and caught her in a trap. I didn't want the bright, defiant creature to crouch and flinch before me in her corner. And, as I tried to realize our encounter, that was how I saw her—crouching and flinching in a corner. It wouldn't have been quite so awful if the man had been any other man but Jevons. I could not imagine a worse position for a girl like Viola Thesiger than to be caught running off to Belgium, or anywhere, with Jevons, and told to leave him and go home. Put brutally, that was what I had to tell her.

The only way to do it was to ignore the unspeakable element in the affair—to ignore Jevons. To behave as if I'd never heard of him; as if she were just travelling in Belgium on her own account and staying in Bruges alone.

And that—if she had only let me—was what I tried to do.

I remember vividly everything that passed in that interview, but I do not know how to reproduce it, how to give anything like an impression of the marvellous thing it was,

or that it turned into under her hands. It ought, you see, to have been so ugly, so humiliating, so absolutely intolerable for both of us. And it wasn't. She took it from me, at the end, and held it up, as it were a little way out of my grasp; and before I knew where I was, with some sudden twist or turn she had brought beauty out of it. Clear and exquisite beauty.

I found her in her room at the *pension*. It was at the back, on the ground floor; and had long windows opening into a little high-walled garden. The room, I remember, was rather dingy and stuffed up with furniture. Large Flemish pieces, bureaus, chests and cabinets stood against the walls. There was a bed behind the door; she had put her travelling-rug over it. And there was a washstand in an alcove with a curtain hung across it; and some of her coats and gowns hung behind another curtain in a corner, and some were on hooks on the door. And her little trunk was on the floor by the foot of the bed. And her shoes stood by the stove.

Somehow, when I saw these things—especially the shoes—my heart melted inside me with a tenderness that was infinitely more painful than the rather austere disapproval of her which I had relied on for support.

I was prepared, as I said, for a cowed and frightened Viola, or for Viola in a mood at least in keeping with the poignant and somewhat humbling pathos of her surroundings; but not for the Viola I found.

The *garçon* of the *pension* closed the door of this room in my face as he went in with my card to inquire whether she would receive me. I thought, "If she refuses I shall have to insist; and that will be unpleasant."

But she didn't refuse. On the other side of the door I heard a subdued, but curiously reassuring cry.

She had been sitting outside the open window. Her

chair was on the flagged path of the garden. As I came in she had risen and was standing in the window, with the intense blue darkness of the garden behind her and the light of the room on her face. She was smiling in a serene and candid joy. For one second I imagined that she had not read the name on the card and that she thought I was Jevons. And then I must have looked away quite steadily so as not to see her shock of recognition; for her voice recalled me.

"Wally—how ripping! However *did* you get here?"

I don't know what I said. I probably didn't say anything. The sheer surprise of it so staggered me that I must have muttered or grunted or choked instead. But I know I took her hand and did my best to smile back at her with the stiff mouth she noticed later.

She went on: "I *am* glad to see you. Have you had any dinner?"

I said I had.

"Then," she said, "let's sit in the garden."

I took her hat off a chair and stuck it on a bust on the bureau (Viola laughed). I set the chair on the flagged path of the garden.

"Have you had coffee?" she said then.

I had.

"So have I. But I haven't had it in the garden. We'll have some more."

I rang for coffee.

We sat down and faced each other. She was smiling again as if the delight of seeing me fairly bubbled out of her. One thing struck me then, that at this rate it would be easy enough to ignore Jevons. In fact, if Jevons hadn't given Viola away just now I should have thought that she *was* travelling in Belgium on her own account and that his being here in the same town with her was

a coincidence, an accident. I could have got over Withers and his story.

Then she said, "Have you come across Mr. Jevons yet? He's here."

I answered, with what I knew to be a very stiff mouth, "We're staying in the same hotel."

"You might have brought him along with you," she said.

I said I didn't want to bring him along with me.

She raised her eyebrows in delicate reproof of my rudeness and said, "Why not?"

"Because," I said, "I want to talk to you."

"Oh—" I don't think I imagined the faint embarrassment in her tone. But it was very faint.

"*And,*" I went on, "I don't want to talk about Jevons."

She looked at me then steadily. The look held me, then defied me to pass beyond a certain limit. I understood now the terms of our encounter. As long as I met her on the ground of a friendship that recognized and included Jevons she was glad to treat with me; but any attitude that repudiated Jevons, or merely ignored him, was a hostile attitude that she was prepared to resent.

"What has he done?" she said.

"I don't know what he's done." I paused. "Why drag in Jevons?"

"Because," she said, "it's his last night. He's going to-morrow."

I said, "And it's my first night. And as it happens he isn't going to-morrow. He's arranged to stay here another fortnight."

Her face softened. "Then it's all right," she said.

I had to dash her down from *that* ground and I did it at once.

I said, "I saw your brother the other day."

I could see her face darken then with a flush of pain.

We were sitting close to the window, and the light from the room inside showed me all the changes of her face.

She asked, "What day?"

"Let me see. This is Friday. It must have been Monday. I came over that night, as soon as I'd seen him."

"What did you go and see him for?"

"I didn't go. He came to see me."

She looked at me again, if possible, more steadily than before, but without defiance. It was as if she were measuring the extent of my loyalty before she committed herself again to speech.

"Why did he come?" she asked presently.

"He wanted to know if I knew where you were."

"You didn't know," she said.

"I didn't or I wouldn't have lost three days in looking for you. But I made a good shot, anyhow, when I came to Bruges."

Even in her anguish—for she was in anguish—she smiled at the wonder of my shot.

"What made you think of Bruges?"

"I don't know."

I couldn't tell her what had made me think of it. I couldn't tell her that I had tracked her down through Jevons. I was going to keep him out of it, if she would only let me. But she wouldn't.

"I suppose," she meditated gently, "he must have told you."

I answered quite sternly this time, to impress on her the propriety of keeping Jevons out of it:

"He didn't tell me anything."

"Then"—she was still puzzled—"what made you come?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Your brother, if you like."

"He should have come himself."

"That," I said, "is what I'm trying to prevent. He doesn't know you're here. I want to get you back to England before he does know. Besides—he's sailing for India next week."

Then she broke down; that's to say, she lowered her flags. Her head sank to her breast; her eyes stared at the stone path; their lids reddened and swelled with the springing of tears that would not fall.

"Didn't you know?" I said.

"I suppose I must have known—once."

Up till this moment she had not said one word, she had not made one sign, that had really given her away. And nothing could have given her away more completely than the thing she had said now. She had confessed to a passion so dominating and so blind as to be unaware of anything but itself. It was not so much that it had swept before it all the codes and traditions she had been brought up in—codes and traditions might well have been nothing to Viola—it had struck at her strongest affection and her memory. She adored her brother. He was sailing for India next week; she must have known it; and she had forgotten it.

Her confession was not made to me (she had forgotten *my* existence utterly); it was made to herself—the old self that had adored Reggie; that at this evocation of him arose and sat in judgment on the strange, perverted, monstrous self that could forget him. I've called it a confession; but it wasn't a confession. It was a cry, a muttering, rather, of secret, agonized discovery.

"He wants to see you before he goes," I said.

Her eyelids spilled their tears at that; but only those

they had gathered; no more came. Her self-control was admirable.

"It's all right," I said. "You've heaps of time. I'm going to take you to Ostend in the morning. You'll be in Canterbury to-morrow night."

"Is that what you came for?"

"Yes."

"It was awfully nice of you."

"There was nothing else," I said, "to do."

"You're coming with me to Canterbury." She stated it.

"No, my dear child," I said, "I am not. You don't want them to think you went to Bruges with *me*."

This was by implication a reference to Jevons. It was as near as I had let myself get to him.

She said, "What are you going to do, then?"

"I'm going to put you on the boat at Ostend, and then I'm coming back here."

It must have been at this point that the *garçon* brought the coffee. For I remember our sitting out there and drinking it amicably until the aroma of it gave Viola an idea.

"What time shall we have to start to-morrow?"

I said, "First thing in the morning."

"Then," she said, "it does seem a pity not to send for Jimmy."

I could see now that there was some deadly purpose in her persistence. But this time I couldn't bear it, and I lost my temper.

I said, "Send for him. Send for him, if you can't live ten minutes without him."

I was sorry even at the time; I have been ashamed since. For, so far from resenting my abominable rudeness—as, under any conclusion, she had a perfect right to—she merely said, "I'm only thinking that if I've got to

go so soon to-morrow it'll be horribly lonely for him over there."

"He doesn't expect to see you. We arranged all that."

She pondered it, still with that curious absence of resentment. It was as if, recognizing the danger of the situation, she submitted to any steps, however disagreeable, that were necessary for her safety. It was clear that she trusted me; less clear that she trusted Jevons.

One thing remained mysterious to her.

"What are you coming back here for?" she asked.

I let her have it straight: "To look after Jevons."

"What do you suppose he'd do?"

"He might get into England before your brother got out of it."

She smiled. "What do you suppose, then, Reggie'd do?"

I said I knew what I'd do if I were Reggie.

She smiled again. "I see. You're saving him from Reggie."

"I'm not thinking of him, I can assure you."

At that she said, "Dear Wally, so you think you're saving me."

"I'm trying to," I said. "As far as your people are concerned. You don't want them to know you've been here. If you'll only leave it to me, they won't know."

"I'm not going to lie about it. I shall tell them if they ask me."

"Not Reggie," I said.

"Yes, Reggie. If he asks me. Reggie's the very last person I should think of lying to."

It was this attitude of hers that first shook me in my conclusions. For I'm afraid I'd come to certain very definite conclusions.

Why, I asked her, hadn't she told them before she came?

"Because," she said, "there's no use worrying them. They'd have tried to stop me. You can't imagine what an awful fuss they'd have made. I daresay I might never have got off at all."

What I couldn't understand was her attitude. I mean I couldn't reconcile the secrecy she had practised with her amazing frankness now.

Her manner was supremely assured.

It wasn't, mind you, the brazen assurance of a woman who has been found out and flings up the game; it was a curiously tranquil and patient candour, with something mysterious about it, as if she had knowledge that I couldn't have, and bore with me through all my ignorance and blundering. In fact, from beginning to end, except for the one moment when I upset her by telling her about Reggie's sailing, she showed an extraordinary tranquillity.

But as I couldn't understand her I simply said, "I wish you hadn't got off."

She said in that same quiet way, "I had to."

"Because," I said, "he made you."

Since she had dragged Jevons in she should have him in. I wasn't going to keep him out now to spare her. I had a right to know the truth. She had shaken my conclusions. She had left me in a doubt more unbearable than any certainty, and I considered that I had a right to know. I was determined to know now and end it. That shows that I must have trusted her; that I knew she wouldn't lie to me.

"But," she said, with the least perceptible surprise, "he didn't make me."

"He told me he did."

"He told you?—What did he say exactly?"

"He said—if you must know—that he hadn't brought you, but that he had made you come."

"He didn't. He didn't really. But supposing he had —what then?"

"You *want* me to tell you what I think of it?"

"Yes."

"I think it was a beastly thing to make you do. He couldn't have done it—you *know* he couldn't have done it—if he hadn't been a bit of a blackguard."

I was going to say, "as well as a bounder"; but I didn't want to rub that in. I judged that when the poor child came to her senses her cup would be full enough without my pouring.

"But, you see," she said, still peaceably, "he didn't do it. He only *said* he did. That was his niceness. He wanted to save me."

"My dear child, if it's saving you to bring you out here without your people knowing anything about it, and to let you be seen with him everywhere——"

"He didn't bring me. He said he wished I could come with him. And I said I wished I could. I almost asked him to take me; and he said he couldn't. Then he went off by himself. He was all right till he got to Bruges. Then he wrote and said that the beauty of it hurt him, that it was awful being here without me, and that he was coming back at the end of the week without seeing any more of it, because he couldn't bear to know what I was missing. He was going to keep the other places till we could see them together. So I wired to say I was coming, and I came."

"What did you do it for, Viola?"

"Wally, I asked myself that as soon as I got into the train. And it wasn't till I was half across the Channel that I knew why."

She stopped and stared as if at the wonder of herself explained.

"I did it to burn my boats."

I suppose *I* stared at that. For she expounded:

"To make it impossible to go back."

I said, "My dear child, that was very reckless of you."

She said she wanted to be reckless. I asked her if it didn't occur to her that some day she might want her boats?

She said: No. It was just her boats that she was afraid of. She didn't really want them. She didn't want —really—to go back.

Then she looked at me and said, "You know Jimmy wants to marry me." And then, "Did you know?"

I said I was not in Jevons's confidence, but I had guessed as much. I said, "Do you want to marry him?"

She said, "Yes. I want to marry him more than anything. I don't want to marry anybody else. I never shall marry anybody else. Most of me wants to marry Jimmy. But there's a little bit of me that doesn't. It's mean and snobbish—and dreadful, and it's afraid to marry him. And, you see, if I were to go to my people and say, 'I'm not going to marry Mr. Furnival; I'm going to marry Mr. Jevons,' and I were to show Jimmy to them, they'd all get up and side with that horrid and shameful little bit of me. Reggie would, too. It wouldn't be in the least horrid or snobbish of them, you know, because they wouldn't know what Jimmy's really like. They're just very fastidious and correct. But it's simply awful of me, because I do know."

"It isn't awful. It simply means that he isn't your sort. *You*'re fastidious and correct. You *can't* marry him, and you know it. You won't be able to bear it. He'll make you shudder all down your spine."

"All that doesn't prevent my caring for him. I care for him more than for anything on earth, even Reggie. That's why I've burned my boats. So that I may have what I care for without their tearing me to pieces over it."

So far was I from understanding her that it struck me that what she was telling me was as ugly a thing as could be told in words; that she was confessing that, being too weak to stand up against her family, she had deliberately compromised herself with Jevons so that she might marry him without their opposition; just as I was sure that Jevons had compromised her so that he could marry her without opposition from herself.

"But—what you are saying is horrible," I said. "I don't believe you know how horrible it is."

So far was she from understanding *me* that she answered: "Yes, it is horrible. But it was only a little bit of me. And it's all over. Burned away, Wally. I burned it when I burned my boats. Don't think of me as if I were really like that."

You see? We had been talking about different things. My mind had been fastened on an external incident, ugly in itself, ugly in its apparent purpose, ugly in its consequences, ugly every way you looked at it. Hers had been concentrated on the event that had happened in her soul, an event to her altogether beautiful—the destruction of the cowardice that would have brought her back, that shrank from taking the risk that her soul dared.

This, she seemed to say, is how I deal with cowardice.

That she had compromised herself by dealing with it in this way had simply never occurred to her. It couldn't. She didn't know and wouldn't have believed it possible that people did these things.

What had frightened her, she said, was Jimmy's saying that about keeping the other places till they could see them

together. He meant, you see, till they were married. It brought it so home to her. And it brought home to her what it meant to him. Because he couldn't afford to marry yet for ages.

If she'd gone back, she said, it would have been so cruel to him. And it would have been so cruel to herself, too.

Then she told me what they had done together. Heavens! How she must have trusted him. She joined him here in Bruges. And they'd gone to Antwerp, then to Ghent, then back to Bruges. (I had followed close on their traces, a day behind them at each city.)

And it had all been so beautiful. She simply couldn't tell me how beautiful it had been. It was as if she had never seen anything properly before.

Jimmy had made her see things. "I can understand," she said, "what he meant when he said that the beauty of this place hurt him. It hurts *me.*"

I reminded her that Jimmy had said it hurt him because she wasn't there.

She looked up and smiled. "He isn't here *now,* Furny."

I took her to Ostend first thing in the morning and saw her on to the boat. I advised her to remove the foreign labels from her trunk at Dover, and to contrive so that she shouldn't be seen arriving by the up platform at Canterbury.

"Oh," she said. "You have to take *some* risk!"

We were on the gangway, saying good-bye. And from the boat's gunwale she flung me buoyantly, "If I'm caught I'll say it was *you* I went off with. They won't mind that half so much."

I went back to Bruges the same day and found Jevons disconsolate where I had left him in his hotel. I took him to Brussels in the hope of finding Withers there and

confusing him in his ideas. We didn't find him. He had gone on into Germany, carrying with him his impression of Viola and Jevons staying together at Bruges in the same hotel.

It was at Bruges that I said to Jevons, "By the way, Miss Thesiger says you *didn't* make her come. She proposed coming herself."

He flushed furiously and denied it. "Of course I made her come. It wasn't likely she'd propose a thing like that."

His chivalry was up in arms to defend her. But I could see also that his vanity wasn't going to relinquish the manly rôle of having made her come to him.

Well, I suppose in a sense he *had* made her.

IV

We didn't stay in Brussels more than a day or two. Jevons didn't like it. He had become sentimentally attached to Bruges, and he wasn't happy till I took him back there. I can't say he was exactly happy then except in so far as he may have enjoyed his own suicidal gloom. I wasn't very happy either. All my recollections of Bruges are poisoned by Jevons's gloom and by my own miserable business of looking after him and seeing that he didn't walk gloomily into any of the canals. As for seeing Bruges, I don't know to this day whether the Belfry is beautiful or not. I only know that it stood there in the grey sky like an immense monument to the melancholy of Jevons. He made me horribly uneasy. I thought every day that if he didn't walk into a canal he'd have another fit of jaundice.

He seemed to be suffering chiefly from remorse, and oddly enough it was this remorse of his that gave me the measure of his essential innocence, as if Viola hadn't given it me already.

It was in his dejection that he showed his tact. He had, for our remarkable circumstances, the right manner. If Jevons had been jaunty; if he had tried to brazen it out, I should have hated him. As it was, his misery might be poisonous, but it was most disarming. So was his trust in me. He realized that he had got Viola into the devil of a mess, and he looked, intelligently, to me to get her out of it. And with the same confiding simplicity he put

himself into my hands now. The adventure had shaken his nerve and he was afraid of himself, afraid of doing some supremely foolish thing like following Viola to Canterbury. I believe he would have consented to stay in Bruges long after the term I had imposed if I had told him it was necessary.

I said I took him to Brussels and brought him back to Bruges. He submitted to be brought and taken; to be banged about in trains and omnibuses, to be fetched and carried like a parcel. He let me feel in the most touching manner that my presence was a comfort to him, while he recognized that his might be anything but a comfort to me. I know I had nothing to do with Jevons's melancholy. The fat proprietor and his wife (who smiled at us by way of encouragement in our passages to and fro before their bureau), these thralls of Jevons's odd fascination, had confided to me that he had been much worse the day before I came. The poor gentleman could neither eat nor sleep; other guests in the hotel had come upon him wandering by himself at strange hours on the quays. (There were a good many English in Bruges that spring.)

I was greatly relieved by these disclosures; they testified to the fact that Jevons, at any rate on Viola's last day, had been seen very much by himself.

We had not spoken of Viola since the day when I had come back from Ostend after seeing her off. I can't recall much of what we did talk about, but I remember that Jevons's remarks were always interesting, and that in his lucid intervals he laid himself out to be amusing. In one respect only he had deteriorated. Jevons's strong language was no longer strong. It came, if it came at all, in brief spurts, never with the passionate rush, the gorgeous colour, the sustained crescendo of his first run-

nings. It was a thing of feeble *clichés* that might have passed in any drawing-room.

We didn't, then, talk about Viola. But I know that he heard from her and that I didn't.

The first week of Jevons's fortnight was up when I got a wire from Canterbury. It said: "Reggie sailed yesterday. Trouble. Can you come Canterbury at once. Viola."

Of course the word that stuck out of it was "Trouble." For the rest it was ambiguous. I couldn't tell, neither could Jevons, whether the trouble was connected somehow with Reggie's sailing, or whether in announcing his departure she meant to intimate that Jevons might now return to England; the coast was clear. Jevons, I may say, took this view of it and I did not. It was I and not Jevons who was asked to come at once. Jevons, for Viola's present purposes, was ignored.

With his usual intelligence he saw my point. We made out that the message suggested trouble with Viola's family, and he agreed heartily that he was not precisely the person to deal with that.

Oh yes, he trusted me. He gave me his word of honour that he would stay in Bruges until I either sent for him or came back to fetch him.

Before I left I had a straight talk with him.

I pointed out to him (what he said he knew as well as I did) that on the most lenient view of his case he had compromised Miss Thesiger very seriously. But, I said, he would have had to have compromised her more seriously still before her people would consent to her marrying him. He must see that, with what he had done, by stopping short of what he might have done, he had made himself, if anything, more unacceptable than he was to begin with. She might—she probably would in her present mood—

insist on marrying him without their consent. On the other hand, she just mightn't. And it wasn't as if he could afford to marry her at once, while her present mood was on.

He said, No. But in six months he could afford it. He gave himself six months.

I said, Anything might happen in six months. Miss Thesiger's present mood (which, I put it to him, was very much made up of old Flemish glamour) might change. And if it did, it was just conceivable that she might marry *me*. He was determined to marry Miss Thesiger if he got the chance. *I* was determined to marry Miss Thesiger if *I* got the chance. At the present most of the chances, I owned, were in his favour. But there was just the off-chance in mine.

And that off-chance, I told him plainly, I meant to make the most of. I wouldn't be human if I didn't. I wasn't taking any unfair advantage of him, considering the tremendous innings he had had in Flanders, with the Flemish atmosphere to help him. If I could make any running in Canterbury, with the Canterbury atmosphere to help *me* (he owned very handsomely that it would help me, that I'd be "in it" quite beautifully) why, I'd make it.

Had he anything to say?

He looked at me very straight, with just the least perceptible twinkle, and he said, "All right, old man, cut in, and take your chance. I'll risk it."

I got to Canterbury in the early evening and went straight from my Fifteenth Century hotel to the Thesigers' house in the Close. I spotted it at once. It was all old red brick and grey stone like the Tudor houses in John's and Margaret's Quad.

I asked for Miss Viola Thesiger and was shown into the Canon's library. To my great relief the Canon wasn't in his library. It looked out on to a perfect garden with a thick green lawn, and an old red-brick wall, very high, all round it, and tall elms topping the wall, and long beds of wallflowers and tulips blazing away underneath it. I said to myself, "If I want atmosphere I've got it. Bruges is nothing to the Thesigers' garden in Canterbury Close." I'd time to take it all in, for Viola kept me waiting.

I was glad of the peace of the garden, for I'd taken in more atmosphere than I wanted already as I came through the house. You went upstairs to the Canon's library, and along a narrow black-oak corridor. And in passing I was aware of a peculiar quietness everywhere. It wasn't simply the quietness and laziness of the Cathedral Close. It was something in the house. I felt it as I crossed the threshold and the hall. It was the sum of slight but definite impressions: the sudden silence of voices that were talking somewhere when I came in; the shutting of a door that stood ajar; the withdrawal of footsteps approaching on the landing.

It was as if there had been a death in the house; as if its people shrank and hid themselves in their bereavement. I might have been the undertaker called in to help them to bury their dead.

The trouble was strictly confined to the Thesigers' house. From the tennis-lawns under the high walls of other gardens there came shouts of girls and of young men at play.

Presently Viola came to me. She held her head if anything higher than usual, and the expression of her face was out of keeping with the trouble in the air. But as she came nearer I saw that this gay face was white, its

tissue had a sort of sick smoothness, and there were dark smears under her eyes.

The poor child had paid her tribute to the Trouble.

She said, "It *is* good of you to come. Did you mind awfully?"

I said, of course I didn't. She smiled again, the little white, blank smile she had for me in those days, and I asked her what had happened.

She said, "Everything's happened. It's been awful."

Her smile took on significance—the whole wild irony of disaster. Then she said, "They know."

"All of them? Your brother?"

"No. Not Reggie. He got away in time. They won't tell him. They won't even tell Bertie. They'll never talk about it. But they know."

I said, "Supposing they *do* know—as long as other people don't——"

"But, Wally, that's just it. Everybody does know."

I couldn't take her quite seriously yet. I asked her: Was it the labels? and she said, No, she'd picked all the foreign ones off at Dover, and she got the Dover ones off in the cab coming home, and she'd had Heaven's own luck at the station, nobody'd seen her on the up platform, and her people thought she'd come from London. Of course they all asked her where she'd been, and she told them she wasn't going to let on just yet, that it wasn't good for them to know too much, and that if they behaved themselves they'd know some day. She meant to tell them as soon as ever Reggie'd gone. "Really and truly, Wally, I meant to tell them."

"And do you know," she said, "they thought I was rotting them, that I'd been in some stuffy place in the country all the time."

"Then how on earth," I said, "did they find out?"

"They didn't. They never do find out things. They heard—last night. Somebody saw us."

"Withers?" I said. I'd thought of Withers at once. But he didn't seem likely. He wasn't back yet.

"No. Not Withers. Some women who knew my uncle, General Thesiger. They were in your hotel in Bruges, and they knew some other women staying in the *pension*. They saw my name in the visitors' book and it excited them. It all comes, you see, of my uncle being so beastly distinguished, so that they *had* to say they knew him. And then of course the other people chipped in and told them all they knew about *me*. Can't you see them doing it?"

I could indeed.

"I never thought the *pension* was a good scheme," she said; "but poor Jimmy *would* make me go to it. He said it was safe. You see how safe it was."

I wasn't quite clear yet as to where Jevons came in.

"You say these people saw you. You mean they saw you and Jevons?"

She smiled more than ever. "No, Wally. It was *you* they saw."

I don't know whether I was glad or sorry. I believe I was both. I was glad that Jevons—the ugly element—was disposed of. I was sorry—sorry, indeed, is hardly the word for what I felt—when I thought of the impression Viola's family had of me *now;* of the terms on which I should be received into it if I were received into it at all. I couldn't clear myself entirely, you see, without dragging in Jevons, and for Viola's sake Jevons had at any cost to be suppressed.

"What on earth," I said, "must your people think of me?"

She said surprisingly, "They think you a perfect dear."

"What, for carrying you off to Belgium? That's what I seem to have done. I don't quite see how I'm to get out of it unless we can persuade them that we met by accident."

"Oh," she said, "*I* got you out of it all right."

I asked her, "How?"

She said, "I told them the truth. I said it wasn't you; it was Jimmy."

"What did you do that for?"

"Because it *was* Jimmy I went off with. You're all right. They *know* it's Jimmy."

I groaned. "That's precisely what I've been trying to prevent them knowing."

"They know that, *too*. I told them that you came out to look for me—like a lamb, to save me—and that you made me come back. They think that was dear of you."

She paused on it with a tenderness that touched me.

"You see," she said, "I've saved you."

I could only say, "My dear child—have you saved *yourself?*"

She was visibly troubled.

"I think—I *think* they believe me. They say they do. But they don't understand. That's why I sent for you. I want you to make them see."

"Make them see what?" I said. (It was clumsy of me.)

"What it really was," she said.

I asked her if they knew I was there. She said, Yes, they were coming in to see me.

"They want to see you. They want to know."

I saw then what my work was to be. I was not only to witness to her innocence and Jevons's—if they doubted it; I was to show them what she had shown me in the

garden at Bruges, the beauty of the whole thing as it appeared to her. I was to show them Jevons's beauty.

Well, I thought, it'll take some showing.

"Do they," I asked her, "at all realize Jevons?"

"Yes. They asked me if he was the man Reggie met at my rooms. Of course I had to say he was. It's almost a pity Reggie met him. That's what's frightened them. You see, he only saw the funny part of him."

(I could imagine what Reggie's description of the funny part of Jevons had been.)

I said she was asking me to do a rather difficult thing.

She said, "Yes. And I've made it worse by telling them I'm going to marry Jimmy."

"And I'm to persuade them that that's the best thing you can do, am I?"

She said, Yes—if I could do that——

I said I couldn't. I couldn't persuade myself. How could I, when I was convinced that the best thing she could do was to marry *me?*

She said she'd forgotten that and that I could leave the marrying part of it to her. "It's about Bruges," she said, "that I want you to tell them."

"I can't very well if they don't ask me," I expounded.

"Oh, but," she said, "they *will* ask you. At least Daddy will."

It was at this point (when, I must say, we had thrashed it out pretty thoroughly) that Mrs. Thesiger came in. Viola left me to her.

I noticed that, except for the moment of Viola's formal introduction of me, neither of them spoke to or looked at the other.

I have said that Mrs. Thesiger was a charming woman. I may have said other things that imply she was not so

charming; those things, if I really said them, I take back, now that I have come to my first meeting with her. When I recall that ten minutes—it didn't last longer—I cannot think of her as otherwise than perfect. It took perfection, of a sort, to deal creditably with the situation. Nothing could well have been more painful for Mrs. Thesiger. I, an utter stranger, was supposed to know all about her daughter, to know more than she or any of them knew. I held the secret of those dubious seven days in Belgium. That the days would be dubious I must have known when I set out to bring Viola back from Belgium. I must, the poor lady probably said to herself, have known Viola. And my knowledge of her, so dreadful and so intimate, was a thing she was afraid of; she didn't want to come too near it. But it was also a thing that must be exceedingly painful to me. She conceived that I would dread her approach every bit as much as she dreaded mine.

And so—and so Mrs. Thesiger ignored my knowledge; she ignored the situation. Beautifully and consistently, from the beginning to the end of my stay in Canterbury, she ignored it.

She had come in now to bring me her invitation, and her husband's invitation, to stay. Her husband, she said, expected me. He was out; he had had to go to a Diocesan Meeting—but it would be over by now, the tiresome meeting, and he would be here in a few minutes.

I protested. I had taken rooms at my Fifteenth Century hotel.

She insisted. They could make that all right. They knew the hotel-keeper. He was used to having people taken from him at the last minute. They would send round for my things. My room was waiting for me.

I said, Really?—But they were too kind——

She said, No. It was the least they could do.

This, with its faint suggestion of indebtedness, was as near as she got to the situation.

She must have sighted it in the distance, for she slanted away from it with a perilous and graceful sweep. She had heard so much about me from her daughter. She had wanted to make my acquaintance. She was glad of this opportunity——

(We smiled at each other to show that there was nothing to wince at in her phrase.)

I said I was glad of it too, and what a charming garden they had.

Wasn't it? And did I know Canterbury? I wished I did. Well—I would know it now. And if I didn't mind ringing the bell the butler would fetch my things over from the "Tabard." And so on, charmingly, till the Canon came in and relieved her.

She had done very well.

He, dear, charming man, did the same thing, and did it even better. That's to say, he had a beautiful voice and he was happier in his phrases. He could ignore with the greater ease because he wouldn't have to keep it up so long.

He kept it up till dinner-time. Only now and then his kind, keen look at me told me that he was going to have it out with me, and that he was measuring the man with whom he would have to do.

But before dinner they had taken me to my room. They hoped I wouldn't mind having Bertie's room. The house was full; all the girls were at home, so they had had to give me Bertie's room.

As I dressed in Bertie's room (the drawback of it was that it looked bang out on to the Cathedral Tower and was fairly raked by the chimes), with the Cathedral Tower before my eyes and the Cathedral chimes in my ears, and

Canon Thesiger's beautiful voice and Mrs. Thesiger's beautiful face and the beautiful manners of both of them in my memory, it came over me with renewed conviction that Jevons was impossible; that Viola's people knew and felt he was impossible; that Viola knew and felt he was impossible herself; and that in the face of all this impossibility I had a chance. Bruges might back Jevons, but Canterbury would never back him; whereas it was quite evident that Canterbury was backing me.

I was in the drawing-room ten minutes before dinner-time. They were all there: the Canon and Mrs. Thesiger and their five unmarried daughters—Victoria, the eldest, Millicent, the High School teacher, Mildred, the nurse, Viola, the youngest but one, and Norah, the youngest.

They were all there, the whole seven of them. And they were all silent until I appeared. As I went down the stairs and through the hall I noticed that the door was open and that no sounds came through it. I caught sight of Viola standing by the window with her back to her family; the others sat or stood in attitudes averted from her and from each other.

When they heard me they all stirred and began talking. And as I came into the room I found the girls drawn together (even Viola had turned from her window).

I see them now: Canon Thesiger standing on the hearth-rug, looking handsome; and Mrs. Thesiger beside him, looking handsome, too, in grey silk and a little flushed. I hadn't realized in our first meeting *how* handsome they both were, and how brilliantly unlike. He was well-built, slender, aquiline, clean-cut and clean-shaven; he had thin, beautiful lips that he held in stiffly; he had dark eyes like his son Reggie's, and dark hair parted correctly in the middle, hair that waved. He had tried to depress and subdue it by hard brushing with a wet brush, but it continued

to wave in spite of him, and the crests of the waves were silver, which accentuated them.

Mrs. Thesiger was tall and at the same time plump. She was fair and blue-eyed and still delicately florid; she had perfect little features, with mutinous upward curves in the plumpness. I say mutinous, because Mrs. Thesiger's way of being handsome was in revolt against her husband's. Her light-brown hair waved, too, and to a discreet extent she encouraged its waving. This sounds as if Mrs. Thesiger's appearance was frivolous. But it was not. All these florid plumpnesses and the upward curves were held in tight, like Canon Thesiger's mouth. Their intentions were denied and frustrated, the original design was altered to harmonize with his. Herein you saw the superior restraint, the superior plasticity, the superior *art* of Mrs. Thesiger.

It was all very well for him to be correct when his features were formed that way, but this was the very triumph of correctness.

And she was, if anything, braver than her husband. He could only just smile with his stiff lip; she could laugh over the business of presenting me to the four unmarried daughters whom (she emphasized it) I *didn't* know.

And they—the four daughters—I'm not sure that they weren't the most gallant of this gallant family.

I suppose that it was the violent dissimilarity in their parents' beauty that had produced the engaging irregularity of their features. Not one of those five little faces was correct. Victoria's had tried hard for correctness in her father's manner, but her mother's irrepressible plumpness had made her miss it, poor girl, just as (I was soon to learn) she had missed everything.

Millicent's face, the face of the one who had been at Girton, hadn't tried for it; it had achieved a plainness

I admired because it was oddly like Viola's face, only that Millicent was sallow and thin and dry and wore pince-nez.

Mildred, the nurse, was frankly plump and fair and florid like her mother; her face would have been pretty if her father's nose hadn't stepped in and struggled with her mother's and so spoilt it for her.

Norah, the youngest, was pretty—and odd. She was Viola all over again, but more slender and coloured differently, coloured all wrong. I didn't take to Norah all at once. I wasn't prepared for a Viola with blue eyes and pink cheeks and light hair, and the figure of a young foal. Besides, her hair was outrageous; it waved too much; it was all crinkles, and she hadn't found out yet how to keep it tidy.

She told me afterwards it was "up" that evening for the first time. When it came to her turn, she said: "There are such a dreadful lot of us, aren't there?"

There certainly was. And as I looked at them I thought: Viola has done an irreparable injury to her family, to all these charming people. She has hurt her father and mother in their beauty and their dignity and their honour. As for her sisters, she has ruined what they are much too well-bred to call their "chances." The story of the going off to Belgium with Jevons is spreading through the Close, and through the High School where Millicent teaches, and through the garrison. They will try to hush it up, but they won't be able to; it will reach Chatham and Dover. If they go up to town it will follow them there. Wherever they go it will ultimately follow them. She has struck at the solidarity of the family. To be sure, it was the solidarity of the family that drove her to strike at it. But if you were to tell Canon and Mrs. Thesiger that they had driven her, that they had tied her up too tight, they wouldn't see it. They would say: "We

never stopped her going off to London. But that wasn't enough for her. She must go off to Belgium with that man Jevons. She must ruin us."

And Viola knew that she had ruined them.

And there they were, all holding themselves well, and all well dressed—the two youngest in white, the elders in light colours on a scale that deepened to Victoria's old rose. I remember them, even to what they wore and the pathos of their wearing it; they stood out so against the black panelling of the old room. It was full of oak chests and bureaus and Chinese cabinets, and Madonnas in Italian frames, and red and white ivory chessmen, and little bookcases with books in white vellum with scarlet title-pieces, and family portraits, and saints in triptychs on golden backgrounds, and murderous assegais and the skins and horns of animals. And the leaves of the old elms stuffed up the low, mullioned windows looking on the garden.

And somehow you were aware of great streams of empire and of race, streams of august tradition; of sanctity and heroism and honour, and beautiful looks and gentle ways and breeding, all meeting there.

I looked at the Thesigers and I looked at all these things, and I thought again of Jevons—of Jevons as absolutely impossible. You may say it was pure snobbishness to think of him in that way, and I daresay it was; but there wasn't any other way.

It wasn't their tradition, you see, that appealed to me so much as their behaviour. I don't think I ever met people who knew so well how to behave.

They kept it up. All evening they behaved like people under some heavy calamity which they ignored for the comfort of their guest and for their own dignity. And yet, even if I hadn't known of their calamity, I must have

felt it in the air. They knew that I knew it; but that was all the more reason why they should ignore it; they wanted to remove from me the oppression of my knowledge.

During dinner, perhaps, you felt the tension of the catastrophe; any guest who knew as much as I did was bound to be aware of it. It was in little sudden, momentary silences, in the hushed voices and half-scared movements of the butler and the parlourmaid, in the stiffness of the Canon's lip, and in some shade of the elder girls' manner to Viola.

I remember how, in one of those silences, Norah, who sat facing me, leaned forward and addressed me. She said, "Mr. Furnival, you've come from Belgium, haven't you? Do tell me about it! I can't get a word out of Viola."

I supposed they hadn't told Norah. They had spared the youngest. She was only seventeen.

The butler and the parlourmaid, standing rigid by the sideboard, looked at each other in their fright. Mrs. Thesiger saw them and flushed. But Canon Thesiger, who had his back to them, observed that Belgium was a large order, and that Mr. Furnival would have to tell her about it afterwards.

But there was never any afterwards for Norah. She said, "I believe there's a joke about Belgium, and that Mr. Furnival's in it."

Viola laughed. It was, on the whole, the best thing she could do. If I'd giggled, too, it might have helped, but I didn't dare to, sitting there beside Mrs. Thesiger.

The Canon pushed a dish of chocolates in front of his youngest daughter to keep her quiet, and then plunged like a hero into the tendencies of modern music, which he deplored. He asked my opinion of Richard Strauss, a composer of whom he was profoundly ignorant. Scarlatti

and Corelli tided us over dessert, and Purcell floated us tenderly into the drawing-room and coffee. After coffee the Canon took me into the library (he said) for a smoke.

I could see by the fuss he made about his cigarettes that he was nervous, staving off the moment.

It came with the silence of the first cigarette. There were no transitions. He simply settled himself a little deeper into his chair and said, "I'm a little anxious about that girl of mine."

I said, "*Are* you, sir?" as if I were surprised.

"Well"—he was evidently trying to steer between his decision to ignore and his desire for knowledge—"you see, she's rather reckless and impulsive."

I agreed. She was—a little.

"More than a little, I'm afraid. Do you know anything of this man Jevons she talks about?"

That was masterly of the Canon, the subtle suggestion that Viola did no more than talk about Jevons, the still more subtle implication that if she *could* talk about him all was well.

I said that Jevons was a very decent fellow, and added that Captain Thesiger had met him.

It was mean of me to shovel the responsibility on to Reggie, but I wanted to gain time, too.

The Canon remembered that Reggie had said something. And then suddenly he discarded subtlety and told me straight out that Reggie had said Jevons was a bit of a bounder, and he supposed he was.

I could see him watching me, trying to break down my defences.

I dodged him with "These things are comparative," and he floored me with a sudden thrust:

"No, my dear boy, they are *not*."

He meditated. "What sort of age is he?"

I told him, "About thirty-one or two."

"Ah!"

And then: Did I know anything about the young man's morals?

I assured him I had never heard a word against them.

He looked at me keenly and I remembered the words of Withers which I *had* heard. Still, I knew nothing against Jevons's morals, and I said they were all right for all I knew.

"Never mind what you *know*," he answered. "What do you think?"

I said I thought that Jevons had as clean a record as any man I knew.

"You mean," he said, "these things are comparative?"

I said I meant I only wished my morals were as clean. (I went as far as that for Viola—to save her. Besides, there was Jevons to be thought of. I was there to take a fair advantage of him, not an unfair one.)

He took another look at me that seemed to satisfy him, for he said: "Thank you. That's all I want to know."

We smoked in silence. Presently we went into the drawing-room "for a little music." Victoria played. The Canon and Mildred and Norah sang. Millicent went upstairs to prepare a lecture.

When the music was over Viola and Mildred and Norah and I went into the garden, and very soon Mildred and Norah drifted back into the house again and left me with Viola.

She began at once, "Well—did you make him understand?"

I said I hadn't had much opportunity.

Did he ask me about Bruges? No, but he had asked me about Jevons. I told her more or less how I had answered, and she said it was dear of me.

"But it's no use telling them anything about *me*, Wally."

I asked her, Had they said much?

She said, "No. It's what they think. Or rather, what they don't think. They'll never think the same of me again. And they'll never trust me."

I said, Come, it wasn't so bad as all that.

But she stuck to it.

"There!" she said. "Didn't I tell you?"

Mrs. Thesiger from the drawing-room window was calling to us to come in. The grass was damp.

"They won't trust me even with you."

I thought: "Poor little Viola—she's burned her boats with a vengeance."

Presently it was Bertie's room again, and moonlight, and the Cathedral chimes. They kept me awake all night.

Of course I hadn't made them understand. How could I? The peculiar awfulness of their calamity was that they knew so little about it. They didn't know, after all, what had happened at Bruges; they didn't know what lengths Viola had gone to. And though they evidently thought that I knew, that wasn't any good to them. They couldn't ask me what had happened at Bruges. They couldn't cross-question me about Viola's "lengths." I couldn't tell them that, according to my lights, nothing *had* happened, that Viola's lengths were not likely to be very long. Besides, even if I had come with the proofs of her innocence in my hands, and removed their private sorrow, that wouldn't have repaired their public wrong. Nobody was going to believe in Viola's innocence. Appearances were dead against her.

It was awful for them every way they looked at it; awful if she married Jevons just because she had to;

awful even if she hadn't to, so long as people thought she had; awful if she married him for any reason; more awful if she didn't marry him at all. And supposing she married him. They might go on ignoring for ever and ever, but who else would, with that marriage staring them in the face and perpetuating the disgraceful memory?

It struck me that Viola herself must see that there was only one way in which I could make them understand, only one thing that I could do for her, and that I had come to do it.

The next morning I asked Canon Thesiger if he could give me half an hour. He gave it with a sort of sad alacrity. I didn't anticipate the smallest difficulty with him or with any of Viola's family. They seemed to be looking to me pathetically to save them. I had every reason to know that my one chance was good, and that poor Jevons, with all his chances, wasn't anywhere. In fact, I found in that half-hour with the Canon that my very fairness to Jevons had worked against him to abase him, while it raised me several points in the Canon's estimation. He had seen what I had been driving at. The cleaner I made out Jevons's record to be, the better I succeeded in shielding Viola. He expressed in the most moving terms his admiration of my moral beauty.

And yet (I suppose I must have overdone it) it was my moral beauty that dished me with the Canon. I had reckoned, you see, without his, without Mrs. Thesiger's.

I told him straight out that if he and Mrs. Thesiger would allow me, I meant to ask Viola to marry me. His lip stiffened.

I said I hoped it wouldn't be a violent shock to them—they must have had some idea of what I had come for.

He said, Yes. They had been afraid I had come for that.

And then—oh, it was a terrible half-hour!

They had been afraid, and they had talked it over. He didn't tell me all they'd said, but I could imagine most of it: how they had seen that my marrying Viola was the one way out for them, the one way out for her, and how it had occurred to them that perhaps I didn't know what I was doing, and how they had decided—dear, simple, honourable people—that it would be very wrong to deceive me, and that in any case they had no right to accept so great a sacrifice, even if it *was* the one way out. I daresay they said to each other that they couldn't put such a burden on an innocent young man; it was their child's doing and they must bear the whole ghastly ruin and shame of it themselves. They even went further. What Jevons had done to Viola (they'd made up their minds about him) was devil's work. What Viola had done to them was in some way the expression—the very singular and unintelligible and bizarre expression—of God's will. It was the cross they had to bear. God, I suppose, knew the kind of cross that would hurt them most.

A great deal of this he did say to me. He said it very simply, without phrases.

Nothing, he said, would have pleased them better than that I should marry Viola. But—he didn't think that he could let me do it. If I had only come to him three weeks ago——

He hadn't been able—naturally—to talk about it last night. He had hoped he wouldn't have to say anything about it at all, but I had forced him.

It couldn't have been worse if I'd seen him about to put a knife into his breast. I tried to stop him, but he would do it, he *would* put the knife in.

"We don't know," he said, "what may have occurred at Bruges."

"Nothing occurred," I said, "nothing that you need mind."

He said, "That's what the child tells me."

And I, "Surely, sir, you believe her word?"

Of course—of course he believed her word. Viola, he said, might keep the truth from them if (he smiled in spite of himself) if she thought it would not be good for them to know it. But she had never told them an untruth. Never. She was—essentially—truthful.

"Only," he said, "we don't know what she may have been driven to. She may have been trying to shield that man Jevons."

I said I was convinced that, technically, Jevons was innocent. It looked as if he had been criminally reckless and inconsiderate; but he seemed to have honestly thought that there was no harm in Viola's joining him in Bruges.

But the Canon didn't want to know what Jevons had thought, honestly or otherwise. Or what Viola had thought. "It's what they've done," he said. "You can't get over it."

I said what they'd done didn't amount to more than looking at the Belfry. I could very easily get over that.

He said that I was an Israelite indeed. But the world wasn't all Belfries, and we must look at it like men of the world.

"They travelled together, Furnival. They travelled together."

I said, "Yes. And it wasn't till they'd got to Bruges the second time that Jevons realized that they never ought to. As soon as he did realize it, he cleared out."

He did that too late, the Canon insisted. It was no good my trying to shield Jevons. It wasn't easy to believe that Jevons was as innocent as Viola, and, as no-

body was going to believe it, the injury the brute had done her was irreparable.

"Not," I said, "if she marries me."

He said, "My dear boy, supposing—supposing it isn't all as innocent as you think? You can't marry her."

I said that made no difference. It was all the more reason.

All the more reason, he insisted, for her marrying Jevons.

That, he said, was what they'd have to go into.

But there I took a high stand. I said it was for me to go into it, and if I didn't, why should they? If I believed in Viola, surely they might? If I knew that she could do nothing and feel nothing that was not beautiful, wasn't my knowledge good enough for them? I said, "I shall go to her at once and ask her to marry me."

He got up and laid his hand on my arm. "No," he said. "Not at once. Wait. Far better wait."

I asked him, "How long?"

He said, "Till she's had time to get over him."

Mrs. Thesiger (I had half an hour with her, too) said the same thing. "Wait," she said, "at any rate, another week."

She had given her, as Jevons would have said, a week.

I waited.

I stayed with the Thesigers a week. In fact, I stayed ten days. I got used to the chimes and slept through them. I played chess with Mrs. Thesiger; I played golf and tennis with the girls and the young subalterns of the garrison; I played violent hockey with Mildred and Norah; I walked with Viola and Victoria; I tried to talk to Millicent (Millicent, I must own, was a bit beyond me); I played tennis again (singles) against Norah, who

was bent on beating me. We all went for picnics with the subalterns into Romney Marshes and visited Winchelsea and Rye. And in between I was taken by Canon and Mrs. Thesiger to lunch or dinner or tea in the other Canons' houses, and was introduced to the Dean and the Archbishop. I attended the Cathedral services to an extent that provoked Viola to denounce me as a humbug.

I told her I did it in order to look at the finest spectacle of defiance I had ever seen—the Canon in his stall in the chancel singing the solo in the anthem with his beautiful voice, in the very teeth of disaster, as if nothing had happened.

She said, "Daddy is beautiful, isn't he? He had a sore throat for a fortnight after Aunt Vicky died. And he thinks this is far worse, but he won't go back on me. So he sings."

I was sitting with her in the garden on the Sunday evening. I said to her, "Viola, you were caught with the beauty of Bruges. Why can't you see the beauty of all this?"

She looked at me with her great dark eyes (they were very young and brilliant), and she answered, "Dear Walter, I've been seeing the beauty of it all my life."

I was seeing it for the first time.

I made the most of it, of the Canterbury atmosphere. I sank into it and felt it sinking into me. I was, as Jevons had said I should be, "in it."

And, as I made my running, I thought with some remorse of that unfortunate one, languishing in Bruges on his parole. But Canterbury would have been no use to Jevons if he had been there.

There's no doubt that I did something for the Thesigers in those ten days. I had effaced Jevons's legend. I had even effaced my own legend (for the scandal, if you re-

member, had begun with me). And the Thesigers were tackling their catastrophe with dignity and courage and, I think, considerable success. By having me there, by being charming to me, by presenting me openly and honourably to all their friends, they gave slander the most effective answer. People asked each other: Was it likely that the Thesigers would receive young Furnival with open arms if young Furnival had been the man they'd heard about?

At the end of my week the whole seven of them were almost merry. (I may say Norah, the youngest, had been merry all the time.) My visit lapped over into another week.

At the end of ten days my relations with Canon and Mrs. Thesiger became so intimate that we could discuss the situation. They could even smile when I reminded them that there was one good thing about it—Canterbury didn't, and *couldn't,* realize Jevons.

They hoped devoutly that it never would.

And they thought it wouldn't. By this time, poor darlings, they believed that I had saved them; that Jevons was an illness and that Viola had got over him; that I had cured Viola of Jevons.

I believed it myself. She had avoided me most of the time; she had left me to her sisters, particularly the youngest, Norah. And when I was alone with her she was silent and embarrassed. I thought: "She is beginning to be afraid of me. And that is an excellent sign."

The night before I left Canterbury I asked her, for the third time, to marry me.

She said, "I know why you're asking me, and it's dear of you. But it's no good. It can't be done. Not even that way."

V

The next day I went back to Bruges to release Jevons from his parole.

I found him sitting tight in his hotel in the Market-Place, waiting my return with composure.

He had recovered in my absence and had been making the best of his internment. He had written a series of articles on "The Old Cities of Flanders." He worked them up afterwards into that little masterpiece of his, "My Flemish Journal," which gave him his European celebrity (it must have made delightful reading for the Thesigers). There was no delay, no reverse, no calamity that Jevons couldn't turn into use and profit as it came. Yes, I know, and into charm and beauty. Viola Thesiger lives in his "Flemish Journal" with an enduring beauty and charm.

I said I was sorry for keeping him shut up in Bruges so long. He said it didn't matter a bit. He had been very busy.

I thought it was his articles and his book (he had been dreaming of it) that had made Jevons so happy. But I was mistaken.

We spent half the night in talking, sitting up in my big room on the first floor for the sake of space and air.

Jevons went straight to the point by asking me how I had got on at Canterbury.

I felt that I owed him a perfect frankness in return for the liberties I had taken with him, so I told him how I had got on.

He said, "I'm not going to pretend to be astonished. But you can't say I didn't play fair. I gave you your innings, didn't I?"

I said I'd had them, anyhow. We'd leave it at that.

He said, No. We couldn't leave it at that. He'd *given* me my innings. He could have stopped my having them any minute, but he'd made up his mind I should have them. So that nobody should say afterwards he hadn't played fair.

I remember perfectly everything that Jevons said to me that night. I am putting it all down so that it may be clear that what the Thesigers called the beauty of my behaviour was nothing to the beauty of his. Think of him, shut up there in his hotel in Bruges, giving me my innings, when he could have struck in and won the game without waiting those horrible ten days.

Well, I suppose he knew that he had it in his hands all the time.

"You see," he went on, "I knew you'd got one chance, and I meant you to have it. I meant you to make the most of it. There are things, Furnival, I haven't got the hang of—yet—little, little things like breeding and good looks, where you might get the pull of me still if you had a free hand.

"Well, I gave you a free hand.

"You needn't thank me. I wasn't thinking of you so much. I was thinking of Viola. I wanted to be perfectly fair to *her*. If there *was* a chance of her liking you better than she liked me, and being happier with you, I wanted her to have her chance. I wanted, you see, to be rather more than fair. If I was going to win this game I was going to win it hands over, not just to sneak in on a doubtful point. I wanted Viola to know what she was doing. I wanted her to see exactly what she was giving up

if she married me—to go home and see it all over again in case she had forgotten.

"And of course I was thinking of myself too. I'm an egoist. For my own sake I wanted her to be quite sure she hadn't any sort of hankering after you."

I said if it was any comfort to him he could be. Viola hadn't any hankering after me at all. This—if he cared to know it—was the third time that I had proposed to her and been turned down.

He said he *did* care to know it, very much. It was most important.

"I," he said, "have never proposed to her at all.

"That," he went on, "is just the one risk I wouldn't take.

"And there," he explained, "is where I've scored. I knew that Viola is obstinate, and that if she starts by turning you down she'll keep it up out of sheer cussedness.

"So I never let her start. Women," he generalized, "admire success. If I were to give you your innings all over again, Furnival—and I will if you like—you couldn't make anything of them with those three howlers to your account. There isn't any record of failure against *me*. Good God! D'you suppose *I'd* be such a damn fool as to muff it three times with the same woman? Not me!"

I said he needn't rub it in.

He said he was rubbing it in for my good, so that I shouldn't go and do the same thing next time.

"Because—*now* we're coming to the point—there will be a next time for you, Furnival. That's why I don't even pretend to be sorry for you. There'll be other women. But there aren't any next times for me, and there aren't any other women. This—I mean *she*—was my one chance. It was pretty jumpy work, I can tell you, sitting tight

and gambling with it for ten blasted days. Any other man would have gone clean off his chump with worrying over it. There've been times when I've felt like it myself. It was infernal—when you think what I stood to lose."

I said that was all rot. It was his beastly egoism. He didn't stand to lose more than I did.

He said it wasn't a question of more or less. And it wasn't his egoism. It was his sweetness and his heart-rending humility. He'd stood to lose everything. He'd be done for if Viola wouldn't have him. He couldn't look at any other woman after her. And he put it to me: What other woman would look at him? Whereas my resources were practically inexhaustible. Almost any nice woman would know that I would give her what she wanted. And almost any nice woman would give me what I wanted, too. When I insisted that I didn't see it, he said I'd see it shortly. He gave me six months.

Viola, he declared, would never have given me what I wanted. I could never give her what she wanted. And he could.

He said he admitted that it was odd that he should be able to succeed where I failed; but so it was, and he went on to expound to me all the reasons for my failure.

"To begin with, you're not her sort; or, rather, you're too much her sort. You with your integrity are one of the beautiful works of God, and she's been used to that sort of beauty all her life and she's tired of it. But she isn't used to me. She never will be. She's never seen anything in the least like me before, and she never will see anything quite like me again as long as she lives. I'm the queer, unexpected thing she wants and always will want.

"But let that pass.

"You couldn't get her because you didn't give your

mind to it. You didn't know how to get her and you didn't try to find out. You set about it the wrong way. I told you ages ago that a man's a fool if he wants a thing and doesn't find out how to get it. You should have begun by trying to find out something about *her*. But you didn't try. With all your opportunities you haven't found out anything. You don't know the least thing about her. You don't know what she wants, you don't know what she's thinking, or what she's feeling, or what she'll do—how she'll behave if you propose to her three times running. She's told you things and you haven't understood them or tried to understand. Because the whole blessed time you were thinking about yourself, or what she was thinking about you, or was going to think. Whereas I haven't been thinking about anything but her—I've been studying her straight on end for ten months and I've found out a little bit about her. At any rate, I jolly well know what she wants and I jolly well know how to give it her.

"You see, I was determined to get her, and I left no stone unturned. I took trouble."

I suggested that *I'd* taken trouble enough in all conscience. He laughed.

"*You* only took trouble to get her away, old man, when she wanted to be here with me. What do you suppose I brought her here for? Would *you* have ever thought of letting her come with you? Of giving her what she wanted to that extent? Not you! You'd only have thought of shutting her up and protecting her for your own wretched sake—which was the last thing she wanted. She'd had about enough of that."

I replied that certainly I should have thought of protecting a young girl before everything else; that it never would have occurred to me to compromise her in order to

marry her—even if I did find I couldn't marry her in any other way.

I had hit him there. He was quiet for a little while after it. I didn't look at him—I didn't want to look at him—but I could feel him there, breathing hard from the shock of it, with his mouth a little open.

Presently he took the thing up again. He went on, placably, quietly explaining. "I thought of protecting her too. Only I wasn't such an idiot as to think of it before everything else."

"No. You were clever enough to think of it afterwards —when you'd got what you wanted. When you had compromised her."

"I suppose you mean there was only one thing I wanted? There, Furnival, you lie."

I said I only meant that she *was* compromised. At any rate, that was what it looked like to her people and to everybody to whom it mattered.

"If you will persist in taking the ugliest view of it, of course it'll look like that. I can't help how it looks to a set of old ladies and clergymen in Canterbury. Come to that, it matters a damned sight more to *me* than it can to any of you people."

I said he wouldn't say so if he knew how he had made them suffer.

He laughed out at that.

"Suffer? They haven't suffered a quarter as much as I have. Not a hundredth part as much. They've suffered thinking of themselves—of their precious respectability. I've suffered thinking of *her*.

"Suffer? I've been through all *that*. It wasn't right, Furnival, it wasn't right for anybody to have to go through what I did. But I've come out of it. You've been pretty

hard on me with your infernal virtue; but if you think you can make me suffer more, you can't. I'm past it."

I said I was sorry if I seemed too hard on him. But it would be well if he tried to look at his really very outrageous behaviour as it was bound to appear to other people.

"You admit, then," he said, "that it appears more outrageous than it is?"

I said, "You see, my dear fellow, I don't yet know what it is."

He asked me if I'd like to know what it was? And I told him that, certainly, some sort of an account was owing and that he'd better perhaps make a clean breast of it while he was about it.

Well—he made his clean breast.

He confessed that the sting of a great deal that I had said to him was in its truth. I needn't be frightened. Nothing had happened. Nothing beyond what I knew. But—there was a point, he said, when everything might have. When he had meant that it should happen.

He hadn't meant it at first. Nothing had been further from him when he let her come to Bruges. He had meant nothing—nothing beyond looking at the Belfry. He had thought—as she did—that it would be quite possible to be content with looking at the Belfry. That was where the damned folly of the thing had come in. They began to be aware of the folly when they found themselves going together to Antwerp. He wasn't aware even then of what he meant. But he knew what he meant when he left Antwerp and took her to Ghent.

Because he *did* take her there. He meant—*then*—exactly what Viola's father and her brother and her uncles and her male cousins would mean if they took a woman to Ghent.

"I meant," he said, "to compromise her. But—here's where you went wrong—I didn't mean to compromise her in order to marry her. I didn't mean to marry her at all. There was a moment when I thought that marrying me—tying herself up to me for ever—was a risk I ought not to let her take. I thought—I thought I could make her happy without all that awful risk. It seemed to me that after the risk we *had* taken we had a right to happiness. Certainly *she* had. And I thought she thought the same.

"So I took her to Ghent.

"I say I thought she knew what I meant when I took her.

"I ought to tell you that we *did* have rooms in the same hotel in Antwerp and Ghent. There weren't any English there that mattered—nobody that either of us knew.

"But when I'd got her to Ghent I couldn't—I don't know how it was—but it came over me that I couldn't—I hadn't the courage. I think I found out that she was afraid or something. We'd taken rooms in that hotel you were in in the *Place d'Armes*. We were sitting together in the lounge—you know that big lounge on the first floor with the glass partition in it along the staircase—you can see people through it going up and down stairs. She'd got up suddenly and stuck out her hand and said good night. And there was a look in her eyes—Fright, a sort of fright.

"I saw her through the glass going up the stair. When she got to the landing I saw her turn her head over her shoulder and look down into the lounge, to make sure I was still there.

"She looked so helpless somehow—and so pretty—that for the life of me I couldn't.

"No.

"I took her back to Bruges the next morning and put her in the *pension* with those women."

I thought of the irony of it.

If Jevons had really been the blackguard he seemed we could have hushed it up. If he hadn't repented, if he hadn't taken her back to Bruges and put her in the *pension* with those women, ten to one Withers wouldn't have seen them and General Thesiger's friends wouldn't have heard of them. I should have got her quietly away from Ghent without Canterbury being a bit the wiser.

But I didn't tell Jevons that. I hadn't the heart to.

We stayed three days longer in Bruges. There were still some odd corners of the city that he hadn't had time to look up.

Jevons was very kind to me all those three days.

After we got back to England Jevons's affairs picked up and went forward with a rush. His novel came out at the end of May. In June he was made sub-editor of *Sport,* and thus acquired a settled income. And one morning in July I got a letter from Viola written at Quimpol in Brittany:

"My dear Walter:

"I married Jimmy five days ago. Nobody but Norah knew anything about it till it was all over. But I wrote and told Daddy before we left England. I'm afraid he's had a sore throat ever since. I wish you'd go down to Canterbury and tell them that it's all right and that I'm ever so happy. There really isn't any reason why Daddy shouldn't sing.

"As Norah says: 'It's his *not* singing that gives the show away.' Yours ever,

"V. J."

END OF BOOK I

BOOK II

HER BOOK

BOOK II

HER BOOK

VI

I DID not go down to Canterbury all at once. I was vowed, of course, to Mrs. Jevons's everlasting service (I think I've succeeded in making *that* clear), but I could not—under the whacking blow of her marriage I could *not* do as she asked me then and there. The reminiscences of Canterbury were poignant. I had to have a little time to recover in. And in those first terrible weeks I didn't see why Jevons should have all the amusement and I all the hard work and the suffering. I knew that Jevons had suffered, too—quite horribly—but his anguish, after all, was a thing of the past; while mine, in full career, devastated the present and the future. I had done my best for them, and I could not share Viola's view that it was my business to go on whitewashing Jevons for ever. There was a limit, at any rate, to the number of coats I could contract to put on him.

So I waited. I waited till they came back from their half honeymoon in Brittany (a fortnight was all the editor of *Sport* could spare to his subordinate). Then at her invitation I went up to Hampstead to see them.

They had found an old four-roomed cottage that had once been a labourer's. It was whitewashed (Viola was fond of whitewash), and all the wood-work was painted green, and there was a strip of green garden in front with a green paling round it.

A furniture van that you could have packed the house in stood in the Grove outside it, and big, burly men in

white aprons were taking furniture out of the van and dumping it down in the garden. Some of it wouldn't go in at the gate and had to be lifted over the palings.

Jevons in an old Norfolk suit and with his hair rumpled was standing on a ten-foot plot of grass contemplating a bed-tester and four bed-posts that leaned up against the palings in the embrace of a bedstead turned upon its side, and Viola in the upper window was contemplating Jevons.

He called to her, "Have you measured?" And she answered, "Yes. He says it can't be done. Oh, there's Furny!"

Jevons turned to me with a smile addressed to the bed-tester rather than to me. Viola came down to us followed by a tall stout carpenter, visibly her slave.

The carpenter was saying: "That there room is out by a good four inches—by a good four inches 'tis. An' the way you've got to look at it is this, m'm. Not as this 'ere tester is too 'igh fer that ceilin', but how as that there ceilin' is too low fer this tester."

"Quite so," said Jevons. "And in that case you've got to raise the ceiling four inches."

"No, sir," said the carpenter (he spoke severely to Jevons). "You 'ave *not*. If I take you orf a two inch from each leg of that there bedstead, and a two inch from each of them there postsis, it'll be the same as if the builder 'e raised you the ceilin' a four inch."

"By Jove," said Jevons. "So it will."

"Ay, and it'll corst you somethin' like four shillin', instead of p'raps a matter of forty pound. W'en it comes to tamperin' with ceilin's, you never know where you are."

"I don't know where I am now," said Jevons, "but it might be better to leave the ceiling alone. They haven't started tampering, have they?"

"No, sir. They have not."

Viola ordered the carpenter to go into the study again and measure for those bookshelves. He was her slave and he went.

"Jimmy's been going on like that all day," she said. "He's taken up hours of that man's time. We shall never get him out of the house."

"I don't want to get him out of the house," said Jevons. "I'm awfully happy with him."

He was happy (like a child) with everything, with his house and his garden and his furniture, his oak chests and the dresser and the bureau, above all he was happy with his bed-tester. He said he had never slept under a bed-tester in his life, and he was dying to know what it would be like—to lie there with hundreds of dear little, shy little chintz rosebuds squinting down at you.

"You'll not lay under them rosebuds, not for a twenty-four hour——"

The carpenter had come back to us. He treated Jevons exactly like a child.

"That tester can't be set up to-night. Not unless, as I say, you squeeges of it jam tight between the ceilin' and the floor. An' *then* you'll 'ave to prise the ceilin' up every time you moves of it, else you'll start them postsis all a twistin' and a rockin', an' 'ow'll you feel then?"

Jevons said he felt frightened to death as it was, and the carpenter could have it his own way provided he didn't hurt the little rosebuds or frighten *them;* and the carpenter sighed and said that the study was ten by thirteen and would take a hundred and sixteen feet of bookshelves.

"Let's go and look at the study," said Viola. And we went and looked at it. And the carpenter came up and looked at *us.* And the foreman and the other men came in with furniture and things out of the garden, and *they* looked at us. There wasn't one really large and heavy

piece of furniture except the four-post bed and the tester, and they treated the whole thing as a joke, as a funny game they were helping two small children to play at. And when Viola and Jevons ought to have been telling the men what things were to go into which room and where, they ran back into the garden to see what flowers they would plant in it and where.

Then they took me to look all over the house. It was an absurd house. Of its four rooms there was one in front that served as a dining-room and a drawing-room and a boudoir for Viola, and there was a kitchen at the back, and a bedroom over the front room, and Jevons's study was over the kitchen. Viola said there were six rooms if you counted the pantry and the bathroom, and they were going to put a settee in Jimmy's study that would turn into a bed when anybody came to stay. And Mrs. Pavitt knew a nice woman who would come in and scrub for them, and sleep in the kitchen when they weren't there.

They showed me the little bits of furniture they'd got. Jevons had a passion for beautiful old things, for old rosewood bureaus and chests of drawers with brass handles. She pointed out the brass handles.

I felt that the poor child was showing me her absurd house and telling me all these things because there wasn't and there hadn't been, and perhaps there never would be anybody else to tell them to. I thought of the mother and the four sisters down at Canterbury and of the other two who were married, who had been married so differently. There was something queer, something wrong about it all. I believe the very workmen felt that it was so and were sorry for her.

When they had all gone away at six o'clock Jevons and I took our coats off and settled down for three solid hours to the serious work of moving furniture, while Viola tried

to find the china, to wash it, and sorted all the linen and the blankets. And at nine o'clock we dined on bacon that Jevons fried over the gas-stove in the kitchen and cocoa that Viola and I made in a white-and-pink jug we found in the bath; it was a buxom, wide-pouting jug with an expression that Jevons said reminded him of his mother's sister who had brought him up. He said that jug was all that Viola would be allowed to see of his relations.

I was left with Viola in the kitchen to wash up while Jevons finished what he called his man's job upstairs.

She took advantage of his absence to implore me to go down to Canterbury and make it right for her with her people. She said they'd believe anything I told them and there wasn't anything they wouldn't do for me.

"Tell them," she said, "that Jimmy's going to be so horribly celebrated that they'll look perfect asses if they don't acknowledge him."

I owned there was something in it. She said there was everything in it. And I promised her I'd go and do what I could.

Then I went upstairs to help Jevons to finish his man's job. I found him in the bedroom, making up a bed on the floor. The carpenter had taken away the bedstead and the posts and left him nothing but the mattress and the tester with its roof of rosebud chintz. He had propped the tester up against the wall where he said he could see it last thing before he went to sleep and first thing when he woke up.

The room was very hot, for he'd lit the gas fire to air the sheets and things. He had thought of everything. He had even thought of hanging Viola's nightgown over the back of a chair before the fire, and setting her slippers ready for her feet. He had laid her brush and comb on the little rosewood chest of drawers with brass handles, in the recess. He had unpacked her little trunk and put her

things away all folded in the big rosewood chest of drawers with brass handles. He had hung the rosebud chintz curtains at the window and fitted its rosebud chintz cover on the low chair by the fire. And now he was kneeling on the floor, tucking in the blankets and smoothing the pillow for her head. His mouth was just a little open. And he was smiling.

You couldn't hate him.

He said he'd come and see me off at the Tube Station. But he didn't start. He began walking about, opening drawers and looking at things.

Presently he gave a cry of joy. He had found what he was looking for, a rosebud chintz coverlet. He spread it on the bed and said, "There!" He brought in an old Persian rug (small but very beautiful) from the landing and spread it on the floor by the mattress and said, "That's a bit of all right." And he told me he was going to beeswax the floor to-morrow. There was nothing to beat oak-stain and beeswax for a floor.

He stood there gazing. He was so pleased with his work that he couldn't tear himself away.

He said, "The joke is that she thinks she's going to find this room looking like a Jew pawnbroker's shop when she turns in, and that she'll have the time of her life putting it straight for *me.*"

Then he took my arm and led me away, shutting the door carefully, so that nothing, he said, should break the shock of her surprise.

But there was one drop of bitterness in his cup—"If only I could have set up that tester!"

I said he'd had quite enough excitement for one day and that he really must leave something for to-morrow.

On our way to the Tube Station I told him that I was going down to Canterbury in a day or two. I told him

what I was going for. He had been so happy thinking about his house and his furniture and Viola that I don't believe he'd ever thought about the Thesigers. At the word "Canterbury" he thrust out his lower jaw so that the tips of his little white teeth were covered (they always disappeared when he was angry).

He said: "Tell that old sinner I don't care a copper damn whether he recognizes *me* or not. What I can't stand and won't stand is the slur he's putting on my wife."

And that is more or less what I did tell him.

I wired to the Canon to let him know I was coming, and he replied by asking me to stay for the week-end.

I found the family diminished. Mildred had gone to a case; Millicent was away for her Midsummer holiday; only Canon and Mrs. Thesiger and Norah and Victoria were left. They had the air of survivors of an appalling disaster. The Canon and Mrs. Thesiger were aged by about ten years; poor Victoria looked tired and haggard; even Norah was depressed. You felt that the trouble in the house was irreparable this time. They had held their heads up against the scandal that was supposed to have occurred in Belgium; they couldn't realize it; it was the sort of thing that occurred to other people, not to them. And, after all, they didn't *know* that it had occurred. But the scandal of a *mésalliance* which really had occurred in England three weeks ago was well within their range, and it had crushed them. It wasn't, as Jevons cynically maintained, that they objected to a *mésalliance*—any *mésalliance*—more than to the other thing; I think they had never really believed in the other thing, and this marriage, so far from effacing it, had rubbed it in, had made it appear publicly as if, after all, it might have been so. It was not

only excessively disagreeable to them in itself, but it left them in that ghastly doubt.

And this time they couldn't look to me to save them.

Still it was evident that they looked to me for something. I was tackled by each one of them in turn. The Canon wanted to know if I had anything to tell him. Mrs. Thesiger wondered whether Viola would have enough to live on. Victoria, in the absence of her parents, took me into a corner to inquire under her breath, "Is he really very awful?" Norah—she had known all about it; they hadn't spared her, they hadn't kept it from her; you couldn't keep anything from Norah; she had got it all out of Viola the day before I came down the first time—Norah told me I'd have to make her father ask them down. She took Jevons's view that it was the Canon who was causing all the scandal now (only she called it fuss). There never would have been any if Mummy and Daddy had had the sense to take it properly and treat it as a joke. Nobody who knew Viola could take it as anything else.

"But," she said, "if Daddy goes about pulling a long face and keeping up his sore throat over it, everybody'll think there must be something in it. I could have got it all right for them in a jiffy if they'd left it to me."

"What would you have done, then?" I was really anxious to know.

"Oh, I'd have run round telling everybody about it—as a joke. A thundering good joke. If they'd turned me on to it in time I could have easily overtaken those shocking old cats who got in first. As it is," she said, "I've stopped a lot of it—though Daddy doesn't know it—just that way. You should have seen me with the Colonel and the Dean! But if somebody doesn't stop Daddy he'll go and mess it all up again. Don't you remember how he dished my game at dinner the first night you were here?"

Yes. I remembered. It came back to me, that startling indiscretion at the dinner-table which was, after all, so deliciously discreet. Knowing Norah as I know her now, I wouldn't mind betting that Jevons owes his position in Canterbury (and he has one) to-day far more to his youngest sister-in-law's manœuvres with the Dean and Chapter than to my handling of his case—No; I'm forgetting what he does owe that to. Let's say, then, his position in Canterbury yesterday—a year ago.

Well, I had an hour's talk with the Canon.

There was some awkwardness in having to point out to a man of his beauty and dignity that his duty lay in any other direction than the one he was so plainly heading for. I put it on the grounds of pity. I pleaded for Viola, I said she was unhappy.

He replied that that was not the account she had given of herself.

I said, Perhaps not. But if she wasn't unhappy now she very soon would be if he persisted in refusing to acknowledge them.

But his lip went stiffer and stiffer. He was too unhappy himself to be got at that way. So I took him on the ground of expediency. I said after all Jevons was his son-in-law. He couldn't go on ignoring Jevons. I used Viola's argument. He wasn't dealing with an ordinary man. In a few years' time Tasker Jevons would be so celebrated that it would be absurd to pretend to ignore him.

The Canon stuck to it that he didn't care how celebrated the fellow was.

I said, "You can't keep it up for ever. You'll have to recognize him in the end. You don't want to cut the poor chap while he's struggling and accept him when he rolls, as he probably will roll."

The Canon said he wasn't going to accept him at all. He said that Jevons rolling would be if anything more odious than Jevons as he was. He couldn't forget what had happened. And that was the end of it.

I told him that it hadn't happened; but that to repudiate Jevons was the way to make everybody think it had. And whether it had happened or not, he must surely want other people to forget it. And once start the abominable impression, Jevons's celebrity would cause it to be remembered for ever, or at any rate for this generation. Whereas he could put a stop to the whole thing at once by behaving as if nothing had happened. He had only got to ask them down next week.

"Does *he* want to be asked down?"

I said, No, he didn't. I told him what Jevons had said —that he didn't care whether he was recognized or not, but that he "couldn't stand the slur that was being put upon his wife."

I saw him wince at that.

"That's how it strikes him?" he said.

I answered that that was how it would strike most people.

"*I'm* putting the slur on my daughter, am I?"

I was pitiless. I said, Certainly he was. If he persisted.

Then, after telling me that I had hit him hard, he fell back on another line of defence. He owed it to his priesthood not to condone his daughter's conduct.

"All the more—all the more, Furnival, if she *is* my daughter."

I said he owed it to his priesthood to stand up for an innocent girl, even if she *was* his daughter. I couldn't see anything in it but her innocence—her amazing innocence. I only wished I had his chance of proving it.

He shook his head. "That's it, my dear fellow. We can't prove it."

I said at least we could believe in it and act on our belief.

He said it was all very well for me. I was prejudiced.

"My sort of prejudice," I said, "might work the other way."

"You must have been afraid, or you wouldn't have gone out to bring her back."

"Jevons was afraid himself, for that matter. When things got dangerous he took her back to Bruges and put her in a *pension* to be safe from him."

He looked up sharply.

"She never told me that—that he took her there to be safe from him."

"I don't suppose she knew. She was as innocent as all that."

"And how do *you* know?"

"Because he told me so."

I gave him something of what Jevons had told me, but not all.

"That," said the Canon, "seems to make him more credible."

I pictured for him the night of Jevons's remorse.

He said, "That's the best thing I've heard about him yet. You believe him?"

I said, "Yes. The man is extremely sensitive and almost insanely frank."

I let it sink in. Presently he owned that it was the platonic version of the affair that—as a man of the world—he had found it so hard to swallow—"All that nonsense, you know, about the Belfry."

He meditated a while. Then he began to ask questions:

"Where does he come from? Who are his people? What do they do?"

I said his father was a Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths in a village somewhere in Hertfordshire.

And then: "Is he—is he *very* impossible?"

I said, No. Only from their point of view a little improbable.

He didn't press it.

"Well," he said, "it looks as if he was inevitable. I suppose we've got to make the best of him. What do you want me to do?"

I said I wanted him to ask them down. Very soon.

He said, "All right, Furnival. I'll ask them down next week. But if I do you must stop on and see me through. I won't be left alone with him."

I stopped on, playing chess with the Canon and lawn tennis with Norah, who was more than ever determined to beat me.

And on Tuesday of the next week they came down.

The whitewashing of Jevons had not been an easy matter. It took such a lot of coats to make a satisfactory job of him. And it was not a job I would have chosen. But I was serving Mrs. Jevons, and if my service had demanded miracles I should have had to have worked them somewhere, that was all. And perhaps it was a miracle to have turned Jevons out as a morally presentable person according to the requirements of a Cathedral Close.

But up to that Tuesday afternoon in August my private grievance against Jevons remained what it had been. In his absence—even while I whitewashed him—I could not extend a Christian forgiveness and forbearance to Jevons, any more than Mrs. Thesiger could. I think I hated Jevons. I ought to have hated him—by every glorious

and manly code, pagan or barbarous, I ought to have hated him. And I did—every minute that he wasn't there. He had made me a figure of preposterous suffering. Because of him I trailed a fatuous tragedy through the Thesigers' house and over the green lawns of the Close, under the eyes of the young subalterns and of Victoria and Norah. (Canon and Mrs. Thesiger I didn't mind so much.) It mattered nothing that they were all extremely kind to me, since my suffering was responsible for their kindness and Jevons was responsible for my suffering.

Well, on that Tuesday he arrived. He was asked for a week and he stayed three days; and in those three days I had forgiven him everything for the sake of his performance.

He arrived in the middle of a tennis-party.

The Thesigers hadn't meant to have a party. The subalterns must have known that he was coming and turned up simply to look at him. (I wondered afterwards whether Norah could have told them. She was dangerously demure that afternoon.)

I ought to have said that for the last two days the Canon had been preparing himself for Jevons by reading him. He had ordered—in defiance of his political principles—the *Morning Standard,* and I had found him reading Jevons's novel and surrounded by numbers of the *Blue Review,* which, if you remember, published the best of Jevons's earlier work. He had no difficulty in getting hold of them; his youngest daughter had been able to supply him with more Jevons than he wanted. In fact, in the study of Tasker Jevons the Canon was weeks behind the rest of his acquaintance. There was hardly a family in Canterbury of any education in which Tasker Jevons was not by this time a household word. The garrison club library had bought him in quantities. The bookseller in

the precincts did not stock him (he was not allowed to); but he could order him for you, and did. And the booksellers in the High Street displayed him in their windows by the half-dozen.

I have forgotten, in the blaze of his later fame, that (apart from this purely local reputation) he passed in the provinces as a fair-sized celebrity even then. Only, as Jevons judged himself at every stage with accuracy, he hadn't begun to take himself at all seriously yet.

So he arrived in a perfect simplicity, without any of that rather dubious aplomb with which he tried to carry off his celebrity when it really came.

It was very nasty for him.

He had to come out of the house, following Viola and her mother all the way to the far end of the lawn, where the Canon was ready for him with a face which, try as he would—and he tried his hardest—he could not unstiffen. It must be said of the Canon that he nothing common did or mean upon that memorable scene; but he had—as Jevons said afterwards—rather too much the air of walking up to the gun's mouth and calling on us to observe how beautifully a Christian could die.

And there was Victoria standing beside the Canon and holding herself well, and Colonel and Mrs. Braithwaite beside Victoria, trying to look as if there was nothing unusual about Jevons or the situation. There was Norah at the tennis-net quivering with excitement, and (by the time Jevons had caught up with his convoy) there was Mrs. Thesiger alongside the others, turned round to present him, and watching him as he came on. Viola had turned and was looking at him too. And there were the subalterns at the tennis-net with Norah, doing unnecessary things to the net and trying *not* to look at him.

I wondered: How on earth will he carry it off? How is he going to get across that tennis-ground?

He was getting across it somehow, holding himself not quite so well as Victoria or the subalterns, but still holding himself, coming on, a little flushed and twinkling and self-conscious, but coming.

The situation was, for him, most horrible; but it was worse for Viola. I wondered: Is she shivering all down her spine? Is she going to flinch? Why *will* she *look* at the poor chap?

And then I saw. She was looking at him with a little tender smile, a smile that helped him across, that said: "Come on. Come on. It's difficult, I know, but you're doing it beautifully."

Well, so he was. He was doing it more beautifully than the Canon or any of them. For that group on the lawn were like a rather eager rescue party, holding out hands to a struggling swimmer in the social surf. They expected him to struggle and he didn't. He landed himself in the middle of them with an adroitness that put them in the wrong. What's more, he held his own when he got there. He looked about as different from any of the men on that tennis-ground as a man well could look. He looked odd; and that saved him. They with their distinction had not achieved absolute difference from each other. His difference from all of them was so absolute that it was a sort of distinction in itself.

As soon as he got there Norah came up with the subalterns in tow. She made a little friendly rush at him. She said, "I'm Norah, the youngest. I expect Viola's told you about me. She's told me lots about *you.*"

She meant well, dear child. But she overdid it. She hadn't allowed—none of us except Viola had allowed—for his appalling sensitiveness. The poor chap told me

afterwards that he could bear up against the Canon's stiff face and what he called Mrs. Thesiger's ladylike refinements of repudiation, and the poker that Victoria had swallowed, but that that kid's kindness, coming on the top of it all, floored him. He took her hand (I think he squeezed it), and his mouth opened, but he couldn't speak; he just breathed hard and flushed furiously; and his eyes looked as if he were going to cry. But of course he didn't cry. He was, he said, far too much afraid of the subalterns.

It was a good thing, perhaps, after all, that it took him that way. His emotion made him quiet and subdued; it toned him down, so that he started well from the very beginning.

After tea he recovered and talked to the Colonel and the subalterns while the rest of us listened. He said, I remember, that the building of Dreadnoughts was of more importance to the country than Disestablishment. And even more important than the building of Dreadnoughts was the building of submarines. The submarine was the ship of the future. There should be, he said, at least fifty submarines for every Dreadnought turned out.

That made them all sit up. (It was not a platitude in nineteen-six, but a prophecy.) The Colonel and the subalterns hung on his words; and when the Canon saw them hanging, his mouth began to relax a little of its own accord. In his first hour Jevons had scored, notably.

It was as if he had said to himself, "I'll bring these people round, see if I don't. I give myself an hour."

Dinner passed without any misadventure, but you could see that he was careful. Also you could see by his twinkle that he was amusing himself by his own precautions, as if, again, he had said to himself, "They're all expecting me to

make noises over my soup, and they'll be disappointed. I just won't make any."

We had coffee in the garden afterwards. And it was then that the Canon asked him what his politics were?

Jevons said he had no politics. Or rather, he had a great many politics. He was a sort of Socialist in time of peace and a red-hot Imperialist in time of war, and a Tory for purposes of Tariff Reform, and a Liberal when it came to Home Rule.

And when the Canon objected that you couldn't run a Government on those lines, little Jevons told him that that was precisely how Governments were run. It was a fallacy to suppose that Oppositions didn't rule.

And again he scored. He did it all with a twinkling, dimpling urbanity and deprecation, as if the Canon had been a beautiful lady he was paying court to, as if he thought it was rather a pity that beauty should lower itself to talk politics; but since he insisted on politics, he should have them; as if, in short, he loved the Canon, but didn't take him very seriously.

Yes; he certainly scored. He gave Viola no cause to flinch.

That evening comes back to me by bits. It must have been that evening that the Canon walked round the garden with me. I see him walking round and round, with Norah hanging on to his arm, teasing him and chattering. I hear her crying out suddenly with no relevance, "Hasn't he got stunning eyes, Daddy?" and the Canon saying that Jevons's eyes would look better in a pair of earrings than in Jevons's head, and her answering, "Wouldn't I like to wear them!" I see his little mock shiver (as if he felt that it was those great chunks of unsuitable sapphire that had charmed Viola across the Channel), and Norah's funny face as she said, "Oh, come, he isn't half bad."

That night he called me into the library when they had all gone to bed. Clearly he wanted to know how it had gone off—how he, in particular, had behaved. I assured him that his behaviour had been perfect. And I asked him what he thought of Jevons?

He said, "Well—he might be worse. He might be much, much worse. He's a clever chap. Where does he get it all from?"

But I noticed that the next day he shut himself up in his library all morning, was silent at lunch, and never emerged properly till dinner-time. Mrs. Thesiger also fought shy of her son-in-law.

Norah and Victoria took him by turns that day. I noticed that he got on very well with Norah. She knocked balls over the net for him all morning. (He couldn't play, but professed a great eagerness to learn.) In the afternoon Victoria took him to look at the Cathedral and the old quarters of the town. In the evening, after dinner, we all sat out in the garden. Canon and Mrs. Thesiger soon left us; Victoria followed them; and Viola and Norah and Jevons and I sat on till long after dark.

Viola and Norah, I remember, sat close together on the long seat under the elm tree. Jevons was on the other side of Viola. I sat on a cushion at her feet.

The night had a rhythm in it. Stillness and peace. The Cathedral chimes. Stillness and peace again. And there was a smell of cut lawn grass with dew on it from the ground, and of roses from the borders, and of lichen and moss and crumbling mortar from the walls. Sometimes these smells pierced the peace like sound; and sometimes they gathered close and wrapped us like warmth.

Then Jevons spoke.

"All this," he said, "is very beautiful. Very beautiful indeed."

And Viola sighed.

"Yes. Yes," she said. "I suppose it *is* beautiful."

"You *know* it is," he said.

"I know all right. But I don't think I can see it as you do. I've been shut up in it so long. It's all this that you've taken me out of."

"It's all this," he said, "that's made you what you are."

"It isn't. This isn't really me. It's just Them. I'm what I've made myself. I'm what you've made me. I'm uglier than they are. I'm uglier than anything here, but I'm much, much more alive."

"You surely don't suggest," said Jevons, "that I've made you uglier?"

"You've made me stronger and cleverer and bigger—ever so much bigger than I was."

"Much better in every way," I said, "than your youngest sister here, hasn't he?"

"Poor little Norah! I didn't mean that—you beast—Furny!—Of course I didn't. Jimmy—what *did* I mean?"

He said nothing. But I heard an inarticulate murmur, and I saw that in the darkness his arm went round her and drew her closer.

And that, God forgive him, was his heaviest score up till now.

In two days he had absorbed the Canterbury atmosphere. He was in it. In it as I wasn't and couldn't be.

And the next day Canon and Mrs. Thesiger took him in hand by turns. The Canon showed him the town all over again all morning. And in the afternoon Mrs. Thesiger showed him the Cathedral all over again; and took him with her to the service. And all dinner-time Jevons was very pensive and subdued.

After dinner the Canon talked to Jevons about his novel.

(He had retired into his library all afternoon in order to finish it.) He asked him why he had chosen an ugly subject when he might have found a beautiful one?

And Jevons was more pensive than ever. He said, "Well—that's a question——"

He couldn't tell the Canon why he'd chosen it. He couldn't disclose to him his plan of campaign.

"You see, sir, I haven't seen many beautiful things."

He still pondered. Then he said, very slowly, as if he dragged it out of himself with difficulty, "That book was written—written in my head—before I knew my wife."

You could literally see his score running up. By nine o'clock the Canon and Mrs. Thesiger had roped him into their game of whist.

I sat out with Viola and Norah in the garden, when Norah told us that she thought Jimmy was a dear. She was the only one of them that called him Jimmy.

About ten o'clock next morning Viola came to me and asked me to go up to Jimmy, in his room. He wanted to speak to me.

I found him packing, packing with a sort of precise and concentrated fury.

He was going. Going up to town. He had torn through Canterbury, eaten his way through Canterbury, through the beauty and peace of it; he had absorbed and assimilated it in three days. And he had had enough. If he stayed in it another hour the beauty and the peace of it would kill him. The Canon's beauty was, he said, adorable; so was Mrs. Thesiger's.

"But if I stay here I shall ruin it. I can't," he said, "go on giving that dear old clergyman clergyman's sore throat. I frighten him so that he can't sing. He doesn't know what to do with me, or say to me. He doesn't know what to call me. He can't call me Jevons, and he won't

call me Jimmy, and he knows it would be ridiculous to call me James. Besides, he agitates me and makes me drop my aitches.

"So I've had a wire. You'll explain to him the sort of wire I've had."

"And Viola?" I said. "Is she going too?"

"No. Viola's going to stay till our week's up. By that time she'll be bored stiff and longing to get back to me."

He went, and I'm not at all sure that he didn't score by going.

And that night and the next and the next I thought of little Jevons alone in his little house in Hampstead, lying all by himself in his four-post bed between his rosebud chintz curtains and under his rosebud chintz tester, and saying to himself that he had scored.

VII

The Thesigers lived to be grateful to me for reconciling them to Jevons, if it was I who reconciled them. I don't think Mrs. Thesiger ever really forgave him, ever really liked him till the end; but the Canon very soon owned to a surreptitious regard for him. Luckily he acquired it while Jevons was still struggling, otherwise I do not think I could have saved their faces.

In the first year of his marriage Jevons made them see how right I was when I told them it would be impossible to ignore him. In the second year they saw that he had only just given them time to come round before it was too late. The minute he became prosperous it would have been too late, much too late for their dignity and beauty. And yet they couldn't very well have gone on repudiating Viola for ever. A year would have seen them through that attitude. And Jevons's great *coup* had come off in the year he "gave" it; so that if they had been left to themselves their revulsion of tenderness must have coincided with his prosperity. They would have had every appearance of having surrendered to his income.

And they would have missed the spectacle of his struggle.

I believe it was his struggle, the doggedness, the heroism, the wild humour that he put into it that brought them round. They didn't like his early celebrity and they deplored the cause of it—his first novel.

That book justified everything that Jevons had said of

it. It did startle. It did arrest. It *was* unpleasant. So vividly and powerfully unpleasant that it nailed your eyes to it and kept them there. It made a break and a stain in your memory.

When I say it was unpleasant I mean, and he meant, not that it was unclean, but that it was brutal. I shall have written this tale to very little purpose if it isn't transparent that Jevons's mind, Jevons's whole nature was scrupulously clean. Even his brutality was not spontaneous. He broke his neck to get it. You could see him putting his tongue out as he laboured the brutality. You could see him sweating as he went over it again, removing all the marks of labour, making for his effect of sincerity and gorgeous simplicity and ease.

I've said it's doubtful how far Jevons took himself seriously. He certainly had no illusions as to the nature of his success. But whenever I come to this side of him I feel myself untrustworthy. I cannot see him properly. I am prejudiced by knowing him so well. I daresay if I hadn't known him, if he hadn't been so frank in his disclosures, if he hadn't explained so many times the deliberate calculations of his method, I should think him a great novelist. I daresay to a generation that knows nothing about him or his disclosures or his method he will seem a great novelist again. I daresay he *is* a great novelist. I don't know.

Anyhow there were three great stages in his career: the Slow Advance; the Grand Attack; and Victory. (He had been advancing slowly ever since the day I met him on the football-ground at Blackheath).

All these stages are marked for me by the increasing size and splendour of the houses that he occupied in turn; the four-roomed cottage at Hampstead; the little house in Edwardes Square; the large house in Mayfair; the

still larger country house he acquired last of all. And the Jevons I like to think of is the Jevons of the little whitewashed cottage, of the whitewashed rooms, the one sitting-room where we dined; the kitchen at the back where we cooked and washed up; the absurd little bedroom in the front where the four-post bed was set up like a tent with its curtains and its tester; the study at the back where Jevons worked and Norah Thesiger slept when she came to stay. I remember Jevons darting from the kitchen and the dining-room with steaming dishes in his hands; Jevons with a pipe in his mouth and his feet on the chimney-piece, talking, talking, talking about anything—Dreadnoughts, submarines, the War (he had given it nine years now)—from nine till eleven, and then flinging himself out of his chair to turn the settee into a bed for the Kiddy. Whatever he was saying or doing, in the middle of a calculation, he would break off at eleven and drag sheets and blankets out of a coffin-like box under the settee and make up the Kiddy's little bed for her, because Kiddies must on no account be allowed to sit up late at night. I remember Viola and Norah coming in to help and Jevons shooing them away. And Norah would come back again and put her head round the door and look at him where he knelt on the floor absurdly, tucking in blankets and breathing hard as he tucked. And she would say, "Look at him. Isn't he sweet?" as if Jevons had been a rabbit or a guinea-pig, and go away again.

Somehow I always see him like that, making beds, stooping over something, doing something for one of them or for me.

Sometimes they would burst in on him suddenly in his bedmaking and throw pillows at him, or it might be sponges, and there would be madness: two girls running amok and little Jevons flying before them through the

house and squealing in his excitement. Once he went out to post a letter in the Grove before midnight and they locked him out and looked at him from the window of the front bedroom and defied him to enter, and he skipped round to the back and climbed up by the water-butt on to the drainpipe of the bathroom, and from the drainpipe, perilously, in through the window of his study, where they found him putting hair-brushes in Norah's bed.

After the drainpipe adventure (when they saw how game he was) they sobered down. I think it was that night that Norah said, "We mustn't *kill* Jimmy. That would never do."

And there would be theatre-parties when Jimmy had tickets given him, and eighteenpenny dinners at the "Petit Riche," going and returning by the Hampstead Tube.

It seems to me that Norah must have stayed a great deal with them at Hampstead, and yet she couldn't have; they were only two years in the little four-roomed house. Anyhow, we were all immensely happy in those two years; even I was happy. Jevons I know was—and Viola. Viola had never been so happy in her life. She cooked: she washed up with Jimmy to help her; she mended his clothes and made her own; she did his typewriting; she took down his articles in shorthand and typed them; and through all his funny little social lapses she adored him.

When you think of it, poverty and close quarters for two years, and the menace of some of those lapses hanging over her all the time—it was a pretty severe test. You would have said that if she could stand that she could stand anything, and she certainly stood it.

But Jimmy hadn't begun yet to unbend. He was still on the defensive, holding himself in, every nerve strung up to the Grand Attack. This tension affected his behaviour. He knew his danger. He knew there were cer-

tain gestures that he must restrain, and he restrained them; there were certain things he did with spoons and forks and table napkins that would wreck him if he were caught doing them, and in those two years he kept a very sharp look-out. You would have thought that this life, on the edge of an abyss, with full knowledge of his danger, would have made him nervous and produced the very disaster that he dreaded. But no. Jevons was a fighting man, and he rose to these crises and prevailed. You felt that for him the real test would come when he was prosperous, when the strain was taken off him and he let himself go.

Meanwhile it was terrifying to see him balancing himself on the edge.

They moved into the Edwardes Square house in the September quarter of nineteen-eight. This was the year of the weeks of consolidation, his second novel and his "Journal," that were to precede the Grand Attack. The novel did exactly what he said it would. It did counteract the effect of its predecessor; and the "Journal" gave him a place in *Belles-Lettres* where he was safe from the legend of his own brutality.

But it strained his relations with the Thesigers for the time being. The Rosalind of the "Journal" is so obviously Viola, and though he is careful to refer to her as his wife, the book reminded people that they were said to have travelled together before they were married. Her figure moves through the grey Flemish cities and the grey Flemish landscape with an adorable innocence and naïveté, a trifle slenderer and tenderer than the Viola I remember, who always had for me an air of energy and obstinacy and defiance, but for Jevons, perhaps, not more slender or more tender than the Viola he knew. You couldn't say she

wasn't charming. The Canon couldn't say it; what he did say was that Jevons should have kept her out of it. Jevons's defence was that if he had kept her out of it there wouldn't have been any book.

But he never did it again. Having once for all drawn her portrait as a young girl, he left it, as if he would have kept her youth immortal. You will not find any woman of his novels who suggests even a fugitive likeness to the Viola he married.

The house in Edwardes Square stands for the second period: the period of sober energy that led up to the Grand Attack. It was also the period of deliberate yet vehement refinement. Jevons was determined at all cost to be refined. And at considerable cost, with white-painted panelling throughout, with blue-and-white Chinese vases here and there, and more and more Bokhara rugs everywhere, and tussore silk curtains in the windows and every stick of furniture chosen for its premeditated chastity, the little brown house was made to serve him as a holy standard. He said he had only got to live up to it and he would be all right.

And so, in the quest of purging and salvation through the beauty of his surroundings, he had made his place perfect inside and out, from the diminutive flagged court in the front (with one brilliant mat of flowers laid down in the middle) to the last lovely border of the grass-garden at the back. I wondered, I have never ceased to wonder, knowing his beginnings, how he did it so well. Of course he gave Viola a free hand, he let her have what she wanted; but when I complimented her on any result she let me know at once that it was Jimmy's doing. She was pathetically anxious that I should see that he knew how. She let me know, too, the secret of his passionate absorp-

tion in gardens and interiors, lest I should think it argued any unmanliness in him.

I remember so well her showing me that house in Edwardes Square. I had called one afternoon when I had known that Jevons wasn't there. I had left him at his club in Dover Street. (He had a club in Dover Street now; it was my club; I had put him up for it. He enjoyed his club as he enjoyed everything else that he had acquired by conquest; his membership marked another step in his advance, another strip of alien territory gained. And he had chosen this club, he said, because most of the members had retired, to cultivate adipose tissue on pensions, and they made him feel adolescent and slender and energetic.) I had left him in the library writing letters (he said he found a voluptuous pleasure in writing letters on the club paper under that irreproachable address), and I rushed off in a taxi to Viola in Edwardes Square.

She was very glad to see me, and she gave me tea, poured out of an early eighteenth-century silver teapot, in beautiful old blue-and-white Chinese teacups. She wore one of those absurd narrow coats with tails that made women look like long, slender birds that year, and she had done something unexpected with her hair; it was curls, curls, curls all over, the way they did it then, and she sat on a wine-coloured sofa with a wine-coloured rug at her feet.

She began straight away by talking about Jimmy's last book, the "Journal."

"Don't you see *now*," she said, "why I went out to him, and how beautiful it all was?"

I asked her did she think I'd ever doubted? She said: "No. But Daddy hates the book. So does Mummy. They all hate it except Norah and me. I'm glad he wrote it.

I'm glad he put me into it. I never knew I was so nice, did you?"

"Oh, come," I said, "surely I always knew?"

But she didn't pay any attention to me. She didn't care to know what I thought or what I knew. She wasn't thinking of me or of herself. She was defending Jimmy with little jerky, stabbing thrusts of defiance. You could see that the smallest criticism of him made her suffer; that she was capable of infinite suffering where Jimmy was concerned. Also you saw that she would have to suffer, and that she knew it, and that it was this suffering that she repulsed and thrust from her with her stabs. He was making a tender place in her mind that might some day become a wound.

"You know I did," I insisted—I think, to turn her mind from him.

She looked at me gravely before she smiled.

"Nobody but Jimmy really thinks me nice. Nobody but Jimmy knows how nice I *am.*"

And then she showed me the house.

I praised some detail that Jevons had devised (not that there was much detail; it was all extremely simple). And I believe she saw criticism of Jimmy in that.

"I know it looks as if he cared a lot about this sort of thing. And I daresay you think it's silly of him. But he doesn't really care."

"It certainly looks," I said, "as if he cared about something."

"It's me he cares about," she said.

"And do you care about—this sort of thing, Viola?"

"I care about his caring. But I was every bit as happy in that little four-roomed house, if that's what you mean."

"Aren't you glad to have more room to move about in?"

"I'm glad to have room for Daddy and Mummy when they come to stay."

It was as if she had said, "If you think I'm glad to have room to get away from him you're mistaken."

And there was another impression that she gave me. It was also as if she wanted to warn me not to form the habit of coming to see her when she was alone. I should gain nothing by it. If I insisted on seeing her alone I should get Jimmy, Jimmy, all the time.

I didn't try to see her again alone.

But I saw her often. Jevons was always asking me there. He made a point of it whenever they had what Viola called "anybody interesting." By this she meant somebody belonging to the confraternity of letters. Jevons had a sort of idea that I liked meeting these people and that it did me good. The house in Edwardes Square might have become a haunt of Jimmy's *confrères* if Jimmy had had time to attend to them and if he hadn't been so deliberately exclusive. He was trying for the best—not for the great names so much as for the great achievements, and they were few. And there were one or two of them who rejected Jevons.

And then you had to reckon with Mrs. Jevons's rejections. She was as fastidious in her way as he was in his; and besides, she guarded him, so that the circle around him was rather tight and small.

Oh, he was faithful; he kept me in it; he gave me of his best; and if he could have made me shine I should have blazed among them all.

It doesn't matter now which of them I met there. Jevons was charming to them all. He set them blazing. I don't think he cared much whether *he* blazed or not, but if he felt like it he could make a bigger blaze than any of them. He enjoyed them; he enjoyed them vastly,

violently. Having once acquired the taste, he couldn't have lived without the intellectual excitement they gave him. But except for that, for the stimulus, the release of energy, it's surprising how little they really counted for him.

And so it's not those evenings and that brilliance that I remember.

In the house in Edwardes Square I seem to have been always meeting Norah Thesiger. Now that they had a room to put her in, she would be there for months at a time. And whenever she was there they would be sure to ask me. If Jevons didn't, Viola did.

There was that summer, too, when Norah and Mildred came together with Charlie Thesiger, their cousin, who was engaged to Mildred. Charlie was then a lieutenant in the South Kent Hussars. He was a large young man, correct, handsome, rather supercilious and rather stupid. He seemed to fill the house in Edwardes Square when he was in it.

He doesn't matter. At least, he didn't matter then. God knows he never really mattered, poor boy, at any time. But he is important. He fixes things for me. He brings me to the incident of June, nineteen-nine.

It was a very slight incident. It wouldn't be worth recording except that it stood for others like itself, a whole crowd. And it was of such slight things that Viola's torments were to be made.

We were at dinner in the little dining-room looking on the flagged court, a party of six: Viola at the head of the round table, with her back to the light; Jevons at the foot, facing her, with the light full on him; Charlie Thesiger was on Viola's right, I was on her left, facing him. Norah sat next to me on Jevons's right, and Mildred

sat next to Charlie on Jevons's left, facing Norah. We were all so close together that it would be difficult for one of us to have missed anything that happened or was said. And Viola, with the light behind her, commanded us all.

She had been very gay. I don't suppose Charlie felt anything strained about her gaiety—he was not observant—but I did, and I put it down to Charlie's presence, to the rather flat correctness that made Jevons stand out. Another thing I noticed was that, in labouring for refinement in his surroundings, Jevons hadn't allowed for the effect of contrast. It hadn't occurred to him that an interior that harmonized with Viola would be damaging to him. And it was. Just how damaging I hadn't realized until to-night (which shows how careful he must have been at Canterbury). He didn't stand out. He burst out. He never sank into his background for a single minute. You had to be aware of him all the time.

And yet in a party of the confraternity you were not aware of him like this. For then he blazed; and in the flare he made you didn't notice whether he tilted his soup-plate the right way or not, or care if he couldn't use his table napkin or his pocket-handkerchief and look you square in the face at the same time. Neither did you notice these things if you were alone with him or if only Norah and Viola were there. He was happy with us, and happiness was becoming to him, and he had all sorts of endearing ways that would have disarmed us. And then there's no doubt that Viola protected him. She watched over him; she smoothed his social path for him; she removed his worst pitfalls; she ran, as it were, to pick him up before he fell. He didn't know she was watching him; neither, I think, did she. It was a blind instinct with her to help him. And Norah and I helped him too. And as he wasn't nervous with us everything

went well. But when strangers got into our party it was different. Viola couldn't attend to him properly; and if the stranger happened to be rather stupid, like Charlie Thesiger, Jevons didn't blaze and so cover himself; he got bored; and when he was bored he got jumpy; and it was when he got jumpy that he did things.

And Charlie was getting on his nerves.

Still, everything went well until the table was cleared for dessert; and there was no reason why everything shouldn't have gone well even then. Viola had guarded against his most inveterate failing—a habit of stretching for things across the table—by putting everything he wanted within his reach. Within Jevons's reach to-night was a little dish containing among other things chocolate nougat. And he was fond of nougat. He was fond also of chaffing Norah. And he was not prepared to forego one amusement for the other. And Norah had taken a mean advantage of him. She had timed a provocation at the moment when for any other man retort would have been impossible; and she hadn't reckoned with Jevons's ingenuity of resource.

I am not going to say what he did. It wouldn't be fair to him. It was a little thing, but you couldn't pretend for one moment that you hadn't seen it, any more than Jevons could do anything to cover the fantastic horror of it. We simply sat and stiffened; all but Norah, who burst out laughing in Jimmy's face.

Mildred, trying to help him, made matters worse by asking for a peach when she had got a large one on her plate. Charlie Thesiger looked down his nose. I don't know where I looked, but I know that I was conscious of Viola's face and of the flush that darkened it to the tip of her chin and the roots of her hair. And I could feel the shudder down her back passing into mine.

After all, Viola did cover it. She lit a little Roman lamp they had and sent it travelling down the table with the cigarette-box. Then she got up and went to Jevons and stooped over his shoulder and took the little dish from him.

"If anybody wants any more chocolates," she said, "they must come upstairs for them."

"She won't trust me with them," said Jevons. (He *had* a nerve.)

Viola trailed off upstairs with her dish, and Mildred and Charlie followed her.

Norah and I held watch with Jevons, who leaned back in his chair and smoked and rubbed the forefinger of his right hand—the innocent instrument (may I say it?) of his crime—with his table napkin, and contemplated Norah in a drowsy imperturbability.

"Did I do anything?" he said presently.

Norah put her hand on his arm and stroked it.

"No, Jimmy dear," she said, "of course you didn't."

It was then that I was aware for the first time of the beauty of Norah's face. Norah's, not Viola's. Up till then I could never see anything but Viola's face in it, coloured wrong, so that it rather worried me to look at it. I resented the everlasting reminder of that likeness under that perverse and disconcerting difference. If her eyes hadn't been so blue and her cheeks so pink; if only her hair had been a little darker and if it hadn't crinkled——

Now, as I looked at her, I wondered how anybody could think she was like Viola. There was only her forehead and the odd turn of her jaw and nose—her profile, if you like, was Viola's—but (when she wasn't laughing) Norah's full face had something that Viola's hadn't and never would have. I had caught it now and then and couldn't

make up my mind what it was. Now I saw that it was a sort of wisdom, a look of soberness and goodness that I couldn't quite account for.

Then Jevons explained it for me.

"The Kiddy's growing up," he said (he said it to himself). "She'll be twenty to-morrow. She won't throw wet sponges at me any more."

That was it. Norah was growing up. Her soft face was setting and the expression I had noticed had come to stay.

Presently Jevons got up. He said he had work to do.

"The Grand Attack, Furnival, the Grand Attack!"

And he left us together.

Norah looked after him.

"Poor little Jimmy," she said. "I don't think he ever did a *bad* thing in his life."

And then, with what seemed a daring irrelevance, "I wish Charlie wasn't here. I can't think why Viola ever asked him."

"Why shouldn't she?"

"Because he's bad for Jimmy. He puts him in the wrong."

I'm afraid I laughed a little brutally at the extravagance of this.

"Well," she said. "I can't bear him to suffer."

"You've got a very tender little heart, haven't you?" I said.

"It isn't half as tender as Viola's. But I've got more common sense."

"Then why," I said, "did you laugh at Jimmy just now?"

"That's why. Because it was the best thing you could do. He doesn't mind it half so much when you laugh at him. It's people looking down their noses, like Charlie,

that he minds. It must be awful for the poor little chap, when you come to think of it, living on the edge, never knowing when he's going to do something that'll make Viola's blood run cold."

"It must be still more awful for Viola."

To that she said, "It isn't. You don't know how Viola feels about Jimmy. None of my people do. They simply don't understand it."

"Oh, come," I said, "they've accepted it, haven't they?"

"They've accepted it *because* they don't understand her. They say they never know what she'll do next, and Jimmy's come as a sort of relief to them. They thought she might do something much worse. You see, she isn't a bit like any of us. If she wants to do a thing she'll do it, no matter what it is. She wanted to go to Bruges with Jimmy and look at the Belfry, and she did it like a shot. What they can't see is that she'll never *want* to do anything wrong, so she'll never do it. They can't see that there was just as much Belfry as Jimmy in it. There always will be a Belfry in Viola's life, and when she hears the bells going she'll run off to see. And Jimmy's the only man who'll ever take her to a Belfry.

"She's all right. Because she knows that Jimmy's really ten times more refined than any of us. His little soul's all made of beautiful clean white silk. But Viola can't go on telling people how beautiful he is. They've got to see it for themselves.

"I wish *you* could see it as she does. I wish you could see how she feels about it——"

"My dear Norah," I said, "I've been trying for three years to see as Viola sees, and feel as Viola feels. But how can I? I'm not Viola."

"But," she said, "you *do* understand her. If I thought

you didn't—if I thought that you could go back on her—and if you go back on Jimmy you go back on *her*——"

"Well?"

"Well, I don't think I could ever speak to you again."

"My dear child," I said, "you're absurd. I haven't gone back on either of them. Won't it do if I see Jimmy as *you* see him?"

"Ye-es," she said. "But—I wonder if you do."

"Norah," I said then, "I wonder if Viola's as sorry for him as you are. I hope she isn't."

"She isn't, then. She isn't sorry for him a bit. No more am I. You'll make me sorry for *you* if you don't take care."

When we went to say good night to Jevons we found Viola sitting on the arm of his chair with the little dish in her hand, feeding him with chocolate nougat. Her posture was one of supple contrition, and we heard her say:

"Cheer up, Jimmy. It doesn't really matter what you do. Nobody would ever take you for more than four years old."

Yes. Norah, the youngest, was the one who had grown up.

VIII

Norah has often told me that I exaggerated the importance of the Nougat Incident; that my weakness is a tendency to dwell with a morbid concentration on small, inessential details. When I tell her that if I succeed in surviving Jimmy I shall write his biography, she tilts her chin and says I'm the last person who should attempt it.

"Between us," she says, "we might manage it. But if you're left to yourself you'll make him *all* nougat."

When I retort that if *she* were left to *her*self she'd eliminate the very things that make him the engaging animal he is, and remind her that a straw will show the way the wind's blowing, she asks me, "Did any big wind ever blow a straw before it all the way?"

Well, perhaps I *am* the very last person—he made me the last person by what he did to me—but when it comes to exaggeration I haven't attached more importance to the Nougat Incident than Jevons did himself. Why, when he shut himself up in his study that night, instead of hurling himself forward in the Grand Attack, he must have sat with his head in his hands brooding over it and wondering what he'd done; he must have gone straight upstairs to ask Viola what he'd done, or there'd have been no earthly sense in what we heard her saying. The detail may have been small, but it was not inessential when it could turn Tasker Jevons from the Grand Attack as he was turned that night.

I tell you, and Jevons would tell you, it is of such small

things that tragedies are made—the bitterest, the most insidious.

And when Jevons did finally hurl himself, when he shut himself up, morning after morning and night after night, to labour violently on his greatest work, though (for just as long as he was actually engaged) he might be staving off his tragedy, he was nevertheless precipitating the event. You may say that when you get him there in his study on his battlefield you are among the big forces at once; but the interesting thing is that those big forces by their very expenditure released a whole crowd of little, infinitely little ones that, in their turn, in their miniature explosion, worked for his destruction. Jevons, struggling with his social disabilities, was like a giant devoured by microscopically minute organisms over whose generation he had no control.

And the greater the man, mind you, the greater the tragedy.

Still, for those two years in Edwardes Square, he staved it off. It was the very violence of his labour, the prodigious front of the battle he delivered, that saved him. Then there was his victory, his Third Novel, that for the time threw all minor happenings into the background.

He was right again in his forecast. It *was* his best work, and (I use his own phrase) it did the trick.

When it came, the Grand Attack (which was bolder even than his first assault) carried, you may say, the whole position, after demolishing at one stroke the enemy's defences. For he had enemies. He was the sort of man who does have them. He didn't *make* them, at least, not deliberately, he couldn't have been bothered to make them; but he drew them; they seemed to rise out of the ground after every one of his appearances.

Well, they couldn't say he hadn't done it this time.

Done it. There's no good trying to express such a phenomenon as Jevons in terms of literature. You can only think about him in terms of action, every book of his being an onslaught by which he laid his public low.

And this time he had conquered America.

Don't ask me how many thousands he made by it. I've forgotten. They've melted into the tens of thousands that he made before he had finished. Even in the years of the Grand Attack he was making his old father an allowance and investing large sums in case of accidents. (He had been putting by even in the Hampstead days.) How he did it I can't think, though he has tried to explain it to me more than once. The whole thing for him was as obvious as any business transaction (he had the sort of mind for which business transactions *are* obvious). He had studied the public he set out to capture. He presented the life it knew—the moving, changing, fantastically adventurous life of the middle classes. Until Jevons rushed on them and forced their eyes open, you may say at the point of the bayonet, the middle classes didn't know they were moving and changing and being adventurous. Nobody knew. It was Jevons's discovery.

Then, as he pointed out, there were innumerable discretions in his valour. He knew to a hairbreadth how far he might go, and he went no farther. He respected existing prejudices because they existed. He didn't ask awkward questions; he didn't raise problems; he had the British capacity for doing serious things with an air of not taking himself seriously and frivolous things with an astounding gravity.

"You can do anything, Furnival," he said, "if you're only funny enough."

Norah tells me that that really *is* his secret.

But, he said, the whole thing was as calculable as any

successful deal on the Stock Exchange. When you asked him: "Then why can't other people do it?" he said: "God knows why. They must be precious fools if they want to do it and don't find out how. *I've* had to find out."

For one year—the last year in Edwardes Square—he enjoyed pure fame. And he *did* enjoy it—I think he enjoyed everything—like a child with a mechanical toy, or a girl with a new gown, playing with it and trying it on by snatches when he could spare half an hour from his appalling toil.

Heavens, how he worked that year! With a hard, punctual passion, a multiplied energy, like five financiers engaged on five separate transactions. After victory in the campaign he had settled down to business and the works of peace. There was the business of the short story; the business of the monograph; the business of the magazine article and the newspaper column, and the speculations that developed into the immense business of his plays. (I've forgotten how much he netted by his first curtain-raiser.) That's five.

As I look back on him he seems to have torn through his stages at an incredible pace. There are several that I haven't counted, so suddenly did he leave them behind him: the stage when he was literary adviser to a firm of publishers, who wouldn't believe him when he said the thing was calculable; the stage when he ceased to be sub-editor of *Sport* and became editor, an appointment so lucrative that you may judge the risk he took when he abandoned it. And in between there was his stage of cruelty, when he did reviewing. It was a brief stage, but he contrived to strew the field with the reputations he had slaughtered (Viola used to plead with him for certain authors, like Queen Philippa for the burghers of Calais),

until his job was taken from him in the interests of humanity.

Now—I am speaking in the light of my later knowledge—the first effect of these prodigious and passionate labours was beneficent, and I shouldn't wonder if Jevons, who had calculated everything to a nicety, hadn't allowed for this too. To say nothing of the peculiar purity of his earlier fame, which set him in a place apart and assured beyond all possible depreciation, so long as he elected to stay there, the very conditions of his business saved him. He enjoyed in those two desperate years the immunities of a recluse. The results were prominently before the public, but Jimmy wasn't. His study was literally his sanctuary. Sitting there nearly all day and half the night, he was removed from the world's observation at the precise moment when it became inimical. I don't mean the observation of the confraternity of letters, which was and always had been kindly to his personality, and had taken little or no notice of his disabilities; I mean the observation of the world he married into, for which disabilities like Jimmy's count.

He was also removed from Viola's observation at a time when I think, almost unconsciously, she was beginning to criticize him. When he came to her out of his sanctuary he came with its consecration on him. And then there was the appeal he made to her tenderness. If the shudders down her back began they were checked by the spectacle of his exhaustion. She couldn't shudder at the tired conqueror when he flung himself on the floor beside her and laid his head in her lap.

I've seen her with him like that—once, one evening when Norah was with them, and I had turned in after dinner; it was upstairs in that drawing-room in Edwardes Square that they had made, back and front, in an L.

Norah and I were in the long, narrow part at the back; you know how those little town rooms go when they're knocked into one—the fireplaces in the same wall and windows opposite each other, so that the back rakes the fireplace end of the front part.

Viola and Jevons were by the fireplace in the front, she in her low chair and he stretched out on the rug at her feet. And we raked them.

They didn't know they were observed. I think they'd made up their minds that when Norah and I were together we couldn't hear or see anything except ourselves.

And so we heard Viola saying, "What do you do it for?"

And Jimmy, "Oh, for the fun of the thing, I suppose. What does one do things for?"

And she, "It'll be fine fun for me, won't it, when you've killed yourself? When you've burst the top of your head off like the kitchen boiler?"

"I should have to run dry first," said Jevons.

"Well, you will, boiling away seven—eight—nine hours a day for weeks on end. Nobody else does it."

"Nobody else *can* do it," said Jimmy arrogantly.

"It's all very well; but if you don't burst your head open you'll get neuritis, or cramp. Look at that hand."

"Which hand?"

"Your right hand, silly." She took it and poised it from the wrist. "Look how it wobbles."

He looked.

"It does wobble a bit. Like a drunkard's. And I don't drink."

He was interested in his hand.

"You goose, where's the fun of letting your right hand go to pieces?"

"Easy on. They won't amputate it," said Jimmy.

That was in nineteen-nine. This is nineteen-fifteen. And only yesterday Norah asked me if I remembered what Jimmy said about his hand the night we were engaged.

Yes, that night I was engaged to Norah Thesiger.

I suppose it was our silence that made Viola and Jimmy aware of us at last, for presently I saw Jimmy sit up on the floor and take Viola's hand and squeeze it, and then they got up and very quietly and furtively they left the room.

And the minute I found myself alone with Norah I proposed to her.

I don't know if even then I should have had the courage to do it if I hadn't been driven to it by sheer terror. I forgot to say that I was in Edwardes Square for the week-end and that Norah was not staying with her sister this time, but with her uncle, General Thesiger, at Lancaster Gate. And for three days, ever since her arrival at Lancaster Gate, I had seen the possibility of losing her.

Otherwise you would have said that if ever there was a spontaneous and unexpected performance, it was my proposal to Norah Thesiger.

But no; it seemed that it had been arranged for me by Jevons, planned with his customary deliberation and calculation long ago. This may have been the reason why Norah said she wouldn't tell Viola and Jimmy about it herself; she'd rather I did.

I thought: I shan't have to tell them till to-morrow. I had to take Norah to Lancaster Gate in a taxi, and I walked back across the Serpentine between Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park, spinning out the time so that Viola and Jimmy might be in bed when I got to Edwardes Square.

I found them sitting up for me in Jimmy's study.

I dreaded telling them more than I can say. I don't know with what countenance a man can come and tell the woman he has loved (and proposed to three times running) that he has consoled himself with her younger sister. I wanted to avoid every appearance of a fatuous triumph in my success with Norah. And after sticking for four years to my vow of everlasting devotion to Mrs. Jevons I shrank from the confession of a new allegiance. On the other hand, I owed it to Norah to declare myself happy without any airs of deprecation and contrition. And I had certain obligations to the Truth. Why I should have supposed that the Truth should have been disagreeable to Mrs. Jevons Heaven only knows. I suppose these scruples are the last illusions of our egoism. Still, I think that only an impudent egoist like Jevons could have carried off such an embarrassment with any brilliance.

As it happened it was taken out of my hands. Jimmy, who had foreseen the thing itself, foresaw also my predicament and provided for it. As I came into the room he said, "It's all right, old man. You haven't got to tell us. We know all about it."

I looked at Viola. She was sitting on part of Jimmy's chair, with her arm round his shoulder.

"Did Norah tell you, after all?" I said.

Viola pushed out her chin at me and shook her head.

"No, Furny dear, she didn't tell me a thing. It was your face."

"Don't you believe her," Jimmy said. "Your face hasn't anything to do with it. Your face is a tomb of secrets—a beautiful, white tomb. And *you* are all rectitude and discretion. We knew it ages ago."

"How could you possibly know it, when I didn't?"

"Because it's one of those things" (he twinkled) "that other people always do know."

"Were we as obvious as all that?"

"I didn't say *you* were obvious. I said *It* was."

I sat down facing them, and I suppose I must have looked supremely foolish, for Viola began to laugh and Jevons went on twinkling, not in the least as if he saw a joke, but with a thoughtful and complacent air, as if he were turning over the result of some private speculation that had come off entirely to his satisfaction.

Then she took pity on me.

"He means it was bound to happen. It was the heaven-appointed thing. The first minute I saw you, Wally, I thought, 'What an adorable husband he'd make for Norah!' And Jimmy's trying to tell you that we've been hoping it would come and wanting it to come and waiting for it to come for the last year."

"I'm trying to tell him," said Jimmy, "that we've been meaning it to come, and trying to make it come, and seeing it come for the last three years."

This was a blow at the attitude of romantic devotion, and I had to defend it.

"Do you believe that, Viola?" I said.

"Of course I believe it if Jimmy says so."

I sent her a look that was meant to say, "You ought to know better;" but it missed fire somehow. She went on swinging her feet and laughing softly at me over Jimmy's shoulder. She seemed, like Jimmy, to be contemplating some exquisite knowledge that she had. And at last she said:

"Aren't you glad now that you didn't marry me?"

I said, "What am I to say to that?"

Jimmy got up and clapped me on the shoulder. "Never

mind her," he said. "Tell the truth and shame the devil. Tell her you're thundering glad."

At that she slid down from her perch and came round to me and patted me very gently on the head.

"*I* am, Wally. Jimmy, you're a beast."

And she went out of the room. Jimmy said that nothing she had contributed to the discussion became her like her leaving it.

She had left it to him.

He got into his chair again and sat down to it.

"Now, perhaps," he said, "you see how right I was."

"When?"

"The first time we ever spoke about it."

"My dear Jimmy, I haven't spoken to anybody about it till to-night."

"We spoke about it years ago," he said.

"We couldn't possibly have spoken about it years ago."

"At Bruges. Perhaps it was I who spoke. I tell you I saw it coming. Don't you remember I gave you six months?"

"You were out there, anyhow. It's taken three and a half years."

"Because you were such a duffer. You behaved as if you expected the poor child to propose to you herself. I've been trying to make you see it for the last three and a half years, and you wouldn't. There never was such a chap for not seeing what's under his nose."

"Norah isn't under my nose; she's miles above it, and if it comes to that, I've *seen* it for the last three years."

He had tripped me up by the heels.

"There you are—that brings it to the six months I gave you."

"I didn't mean I was thinking of it then. How could I be?"

"Of course you weren't thinking of it. But *she* was."

"Norah? Not she! A child of seventeen!"

"I don't mean Norah. I mean Viola."

"Viola?"

"Yes. You didn't see what the unscrupulous minx was after. She was plotting it and planning it the first time you were at Canterbury. I got a letter from her at Bruges —I can't show it you—telling me not to worry about you —I *was* worrying about you, though you were such a damn fool, if you don't mind my saying so. She said you'd got over it all right. She wouldn't be surprised if some day you married Norah.

"So you see," he said, "you needn't bother about Viola. She knew you couldn't keep it up for ever."

"Keep what up?"

(I knew; but something in his tone or in his twinkle made me pretend I didn't.)

"Your wonderful attitude," he said. "She meant you to marry Norah."

"Why—on earth—should she have wanted that?"

"Well—because I worried about you, and she wanted me to be happy. And because she worried about you, and wanted you to be happy. And because she worried about the Kid, and wanted her to be happy. And because she wanted the rest of them to be happy too."

I said I didn't know what I'd done to be so happy.

"You've done nothing. You don't owe it to yourself that you're happy. My dear fellow, you've been watched, and looked after, and protected for three and a half years with an incessant care. If you'd been left to yourself you'd have bungled the whole business. Either you wouldn't have proposed to her at all, or you'd have proposed three times running when it was too late."

I pointed out to him that I hadn't proposed three times running, neither was I too late.

"All the same," he said, "you wouldn't have thought of it if she hadn't gone to the Thesigers. And she wouldn't have gone to the Thesigers if Viola hadn't got the Thesigers to ask her. It was a put-up job. I tell you, my son, you've been guided and guarded. Why, you didn't even see that the child was grown up till I drew your attention to it."

There was no use pretending I liked it. I didn't.

I said, "Thank you. If a thing comes off it's your doing, and if it doesn't it's mine."

He said it looked like that.

When I saw Norah in the morning she asked me whether Jimmy had said he knew it was coming?

I said he had.

"And I suppose he thinks he made it come?"

That, I said, was Jimmy's attitude.

"Well, then," she said, "he didn't. You don't believe him, do you?"

Did I? Not perhaps at the moment, and never at any time as Jimmy believed it himself. But I do think he meant it to happen. It was one of the moves in his difficult game. He couldn't afford to neglect any means of strengthening his position in his wife's family. When it came to acknowledging Jimmy his wife's family was divided. Portions of it, strange cousins whom I never met till after my marriage, refused to acknowledge him at all. At Lancaster Gate he was received coldly in accordance with the discreet policy by which the Thesigers had avoided the appearances of scandal. Down at Canterbury there were degrees and shades of recognition. Norah openly loved him. The Canon had what he called "a morbid liking for the fellow." Mildred and Victoria tol-

erated him. Millicent endured him as an infliction. Mrs. Thesiger concealed under the most beautiful manners and the most Christian charity an inveterate repugnance.

I have forgotten Bertie. Bertie, who could generally be found at Lancaster Gate when he wasn't in his chambers in the Temple, was apathetic and amiably evasive. He took the line that Lancaster Gate took when he referred to his brother-in-law as a clever little beast.

And to all these shades Jevons was acutely sensitive.

I have known men (they were of the confraternity of letters) who declared that they could not understand why a man like Jevons, in Jevons's position, should have bothered his head for two minutes about his wife's family. They considered that Jevons's marriage was a disaster, not for the Thesigers, but for Jevons, and that his only safe and proper course was to leave the Thesigers alone. But it wasn't so easy to leave them alone when he had married into them; and to have left them would have been for Jevons a confession of failure. He might just as well have laid down his arms or pulled down the shutters of his shop. From the very beginning, ever since the day when he had met Reggie Thesiger, he conceived that the whole world of Thesigers had challenged him to hold his own in it, and he was too stubborn a fighter to retire on a challenge. Besides, he couldn't have retracted without taking Viola with him.

And you must remember that he was thirty-two when he married her, and that he had behind him an unknown history of struggle and humiliation and defeat. The Thesigers stood for the whole world of things that he had missed, the world of admired refinements and beautiful amenities, that, without abating one atom of its refinement and amenity, had persistently kicked him out. Besides—and this was the pathetic part of it—he had an

irrepressible affection for the Canterbury Thesigers, and it hungered and thirsted for recognition. It nourished itself in secret on any scraps that came its way. He met tolerance with grace, and any sort of kindness with passionate gratitude. I think he would have broken his neck to give Norah or the Canon or even Mrs. Thesiger anything they wanted. And the Canon and Mrs. Thesiger wanted Norah to marry me. It wouldn't become me to say what Norah wanted.

Viola, in a serious moment, threw a light on it. (I had been dining in Edwardes Square on the evening of the day I came back from Canterbury after taking Norah down there.)

"I suppose you don't know," she said, "that Mummy and Daddy fell in love with you first? Well, they did. They wanted you to marry me to keep me out of mischief, but more than anything they wanted you to marry Norah. You see, she's their favourite."

And it seemed there was even more in it than that. They wanted to keep Norah out of mischief too. "Not," she said, "that Norah would ever have run off to Belgium, even with you." But that little adventure of Viola's had made them nervous. Norah was inclined to look down on the garrison; like Viola, she had declared in the most decided manner that she meant to strike out a line for herself; she wasn't going to follow Dorothy's and Gwinny's lead (did I say that the two married sisters lived abroad at their husbands' stations—Gwinny at Gibraltar, and Dorothy at Simla?), and that for lack of originality Mildred's engagement to Charlie Thesiger was "the limit."

"It's a good thing, Wally," she said. "It'll knit us all tighter together. That's partly why we've wanted it so awfully. Do you know that if it hadn't been for you

Norah wouldn't have been allowed to come and stay with us?"

I said I was sure she was mistaken. Canon Thesiger——

"Oh," she said, "it wasn't Daddy. He wouldn't have minded. It was Mummy. She never *could* bear poor Jimmy."

"But," she went on, "you're his friend. And he worked it for you. They can't get over those two things."

I remember wondering whether deep down in her heart she meant that my marriage would knit her and Jimmy closer?

I wondered whether Jimmy, in his wisdom, had calculated on that, too?

At that time I didn't realize the innocence that went with Jimmy's wisdom. I think I credited him with insight that I know now he never had. I know now that, even afterwards—at the very worst—he had no misgivings. All the Hampstead time, all through the Edwardes Square time he was happy. And afterwards—well—happiness wasn't the word for it; he lived in a sort of ecstasy. Which shows how little in those days she had let him see.

It was in nineteen-ten, their last year in Edwardes Square, that the tension began. Norah and I were married in the autumn of nineteen-nine, and we were living in my flat in Brunswick Square. In what I made out during this period I had Norah to help me, and she had wonderful lights.

I never could keep track of Jimmy's accelerating material progress, but the Year-Books tell me that his fourth novel came out in the spring of nineteen-nine, and his first successful play was produced in the summer of that

year, and ran for the whole season and on through the winter, and I remember that in nineteen-ten he was attacking another novel and another play, which—But it's the attack that is the important thing, the thing that fixes nineteen-ten for me.

You cannot go on attacking, for years on end, with concentrated and increasing violence, and not suffer for it. The first effects of Jimmy's appalling travail may have been beneficent, but its later workings were malign. There's no other word for it. In nineteen-ten Jimmy was beginning to show signs of exhaustion. Not of his creative energy or anything belonging to it, though he prophesied a falling off after Novel Three, and declared that he could detect it. Nobody else could have detected it. The exhaustion was in Jimmy himself, and more especially and fatally in the Jimmy who struggled against what he called "the damnable tendency to do the sort of thing your father does."

He couldn't keep it up. He couldn't stand for ever the double strain of attacking and defending himself against his tendency. There's no doubt that when he was tired he got careless. I have known him come upstairs after dinner, entirely sober, but looking rather drunk, with his hair curling over his forehead and his tie crooked and the buttons of his irreproachable little waistcoat all undone. I have known him do the oddest things with chairs and get into postures inconceivable to ordinary men. I have known him drop his aitches for a whole evening because he was too dead beat to hang on to them. And Norah, going home with me, would say, "Poor Jimmy—he does get it very badly when he's tired."

And I have had to see Viola's face while these things were happening. Sometimes, when he was too outrageous, she would look up and smile with the queerest little half-

frightened wonder, and I would be reminded of the time when Jimmy had jaundice and she asked me if I thought he would stay that funny yellow colour all his life? It was as if she were asking me, Did I think he would keep on all his life doing these rather alarming things? Sometimes he would catch himself doing them and say, "See me do that? That's because I'm agitated." Or, "There's another aitch gone. Collar it, somebody." Or, "I suppose that's what Norah would call one of my sillysosms." Sometimes Viola would catch him at it and reprove him. And then he would simply throw the responsibility on the poor old Registrar down in Hertfordshire.

I have heard him say to her with extreme sweetness and docility: "My dear child, if I'd had a father and mother like yours I shouldn't do these things." And I have heard him say almost with bitterness: "Does *that* shock you? Good Heavens, you should see my father!"

But he took good care she shouldn't see him. I used to think this wasn't very nice of him. But what can a man do in a case so desperate? There were risks that even Jevons couldn't take. I used to think that he salved his conscience by making the Registrar an allowance that increased in proportion to his income and by going down into Hertfordshire regularly every three months to see him himself. I used to think that Jimmy's father must have admirable tact, because he never seemed to have inquired why Jimmy always came alone. But Jimmy said it wasn't tact. It was pure haughtiness. The old bird, he said, was as proud as a peacock with his tail up. I used to think it wasn't very nice of him to talk like that about his father. And I used to think it wasn't very nice of Viola never to go with Jimmy on his pilgrimages.

I was with them once when she was seeing him off at

Euston, and I said to her, "Do you never go with him to see the poor old man?"

She turned to me. (I hadn't seen her look stern and fiery before.)

"Wally," she said, "I suppose it's because you're so good that you always think other people aren't. That *poor old man* was a perfect devil to Jimmy. I don't say that Jimmy always was an angel to him, but he's been pretty decent, considering. He's told me things I couldn't tell you; and there were things he couldn't tell me. He says he didn't believe in God the Father when he was little, just because he wanted to believe in God. He thought God couldn't be anything so frightful as a father.

"That's why he's so awfully fond of Daddy."

And so it went on. She swung between slight shocks and passionate recoveries. One minute Jimmy's manners made her shudder all down her spine, and the next he would do some adorable thing that brought her to his feet. Half the time she pretended that things hadn't happened when they had. And when her flesh crept she had memories that lashed it.

I used to wonder whether this oscillation would slacken or increase with time. Would she swing on a longer and more dangerous rhythm? Would she be flung backwards and forwards between fascination and repulsion?

And I would catch myself up and answer my own words, "Of course not. The poor chap isn't as bad as all that."

Then early in nineteen-ten Reggie Thesiger came home on leave from India.

Looking back on it all now, I seem to see that until he came everything was going well. The oscillations, even if

I didn't exaggerate them, couldn't have counted. Her heart was steady, and in her heart she adored her husband. There could be no doubt about it, she adored him. It was because she adored him that she suffered. Nobody can stand imperfection in their god.

But then she adored Reggie too.

She hadn't a misgiving. When Norah rushed to her with the news that Reggie had got his leave, she went wild and nearly strangled poor little Jimmy in her joy. She counted the weeks, the days, the hours till he landed. She argued with Norah as to which of them should have him first and longest when he came to town. Norah told me she didn't think he would stop long with *us* if he could go to Viola. Viola was his favourite sister.

Well, he didn't go to Viola at all. He went first to the Thesigers at Lancaster Gate. Then he came on to us.

That was all right. We had to arrange our dates to suit the General.

On the Sunday we dined at Lancaster Gate; Viola and Jevons were not there. Reggie had come up on the Friday for ten days, and he stayed with the General for the week-end.

He said he could stay with us for the whole week if we could have him.

We were out in the hall saying good-bye, and he was getting Norah's cloak for her. The hall was full of Thesigers and guests. I remember Norah saying, "We'd love to have you. But—we promised Vee-Vee to divide you with her."

And I remember seeing Reggie's face stiffen over the collar of the cloak as he held it. He said he didn't want to be divided.

It was so startling, she told me afterwards, that she lost her head. She said out loud, so that everybody heard

her, "Not with Vee-Vee?" And everybody heard his answer:

"Not with Jevons."

Then he laughed.

In spite of the laugh Norah was quite frightened. She asked me, going home in the taxi, what I thought it meant. I said I thought it meant that Reggie didn't particularly care about meeting Jimmy. She said, "Well, he'll have to meet him to-morrow night. I'm jolly glad we've asked them."

She added pensively, "Reggie's quite changed. I suppose it's India."

I knew she didn't suppose anything of the sort. She thought the General had been telling him things; and I must confess I thought so too. Here, I may say at once, we did that kindly and honourable gentleman a wrong.

He came to us in great distress the next morning. He said Viola and Jevons were to have dined with them last night, only Reggie had declared he wouldn't have anything to do with Jevons. He didn't want to meet him if he could help it. He said, Couldn't they ask Viola without him? And they *had* asked Viola without him, and Viola had refused to come.

"And do you know" (he stared at us in a sort of helpless horror) "he hasn't been to see her yet."

The poor General went away quite depressed. He lingered with me on the doorstep a moment. "I'm afraid, Furnival," he said, "Reggie's going to make it very awkward for us."

He did make it awkward.

It might have been discreet to have put off our dinner. But I knew that Norah wouldn't hear of it; all the more if Reggie was going to make it awkward. You don't sup-

pose one Thesiger was going to knuckle under to another. It wasn't their way. They were loyal to the last degree, but loyalty was another matter. And if it came to that she was loyal to her sister.

I shall never forget that dinner. I shall never forget Viola's coming in with Jevons behind her.

She was, as I think I've said, a beautifully-made woman, with long limbs and superb shoulders, and a way of holding her small head high. Well, she came in (they were a little late) with her head higher than ever, and with a sweep of her limbs, as if her crushed draperies (she was all in white) were blown backward by a wind; her gauze scarf billowed behind her as if it were wings or sails and the wind filled it. She was like the Victory of Samothrace; she was like a guardian and avenging angel; she was like a ship in full sail breasting a sea. Up to her eyes she was everything that was ever splendid and courageous and defiant.

But her eyes—there was a sort of scared grief in them.

I had seen fright in her face once before, the day when she came into the room at Hampstead with Jevons behind her and saw Reggie there. I said to myself, "She always was afraid of Reggie." But that, for the second that it lasted, was sheer fright. This was different. There was anguish in it; and it was only in her eyes.

And Jevons's entry, this time, was simultaneous. Little Jimmy came behind her, holding himself rather absurdly straight and breathing hard.

And there was Reggie Thesiger waiting for them, standing by the hearth between Norah and me.

Oh yes, India had changed him. Surely, I thought, it must be India that had made him so lean and stiff and hard. But he was handsomer even than he had been five

years ago, and he looked taller, he was so formidably upright and well-built. (As a competitive exhibition Jimmy's straightness was pitiful. And yet, if his antagonist had been anybody but Reggie, it might have had a certain dignity.)

I wondered, "*How* is she going to greet him? Will she lower her flag and kiss him, or what?"

She sailed up to Norah first and kissed her. She shook hands with me. She smiled at me (I don't know how she managed it). Then she turned to Reggie.

She didn't lower her flag. She said, "Well, Reggie," as if they had met yesterday. There was no kissing or any anticipation of a kiss; they shook hands, not at arm's length, not in the least as if they had had a quarrel, but like well-bred people in the house of strangers. It was all beautifully done.

Then it was Jimmy's turn. Reggie looked at him as if he wasn't there.

If I could have run away with any decency I'd have run rather than face what came then. But the women—Heavens, how they stood to their guns!

Norah said, "Reggie, I think you know your brother-in-law?" with an air of stating a platitude rather than of recalling him to a courtesy he had forgotten.

"I don't think so," said Reggie.

But he bowed. And Jimmy bowed. There was no handshaking, at arm's length or otherwise.

Viola said, "You *do* know him. You met him four years ago in my rooms at Hampstead."

"Did I? I'm afraid I've forgotten."

"You did meet, didn't you, Jimmy?"

"I believe so," said Jimmy, with a quite admirable indifference.

"Anyhow," said Norah sweetly, "you can't say you haven't *heard* of him."

She meant well, poor darling, but it was a bad shot. It missed its mark completely, and it drew down the enemy's fire.

"I *have* heard of Mr. Jevons," said Reggie, and he looked at Jimmy as if he realized for the first time that he was there, and resented it.

Norah turned positively white. It was Viola who saved us.

"Please don't, Norah. It's really awful for poor Jimmy now he's on all the buses and in the Tube?"

She referred to the monstrous posters that advertised his play in black letters eighteen inches high on a scarlet ground.

"How do you feel when you're in the Tube?" said Norah.

"You feel," said Jimmy—he was sitting in one of his worst attitudes, with his legs stretched straight out before him and his feet tilted toes upwards. I noticed that Reggie couldn't bear to look at him—"you feel first of all as if everybody was looking at you; you feel a silly ass; then you feel as if everybody was looking at the posters; then you know they aren't looking at them. Then you leave off looking at them yourself. And if one does hit you in the eye you feel as if it referred to somebody else, and after that you don't feel anything more."

It wasn't brilliant, but the wonder was he found anything to say at all.

I was thankful when Pavitt came in to tell us that dinner was served. It delivered us from Jimmy's attitudes.

When it came to dining at our small round table we saw how badly we had erred in not asking anybody else

but Viola and Jimmy. A sixth, a woman (almost any woman would have done in the circumstances), a woman to talk to Reggie might have pulled us through. But with Reggie sitting beside Viola, with Jimmy opposite them by himself between me and Norah (the only possible arrangement) it was terrible.

Reggie persisted in talking to Viola like a well-bred stranger. He persisted in ignoring Jevons.

And Jimmy retaliated by ignoring *him*. There was nothing else for him to do. Only it wasn't one of the things he did well. Beside Reggie's accomplishment he looked mean and pitiful and a little vulgar. God forgive me for putting it down, but that is how he looked.

And once or twice, under the strain of it, he dropped an aitch with the most disconcerting effect.

I often wonder what Pavitt thought of that family party. He certainly served Viola as if he loved her, and Jimmy as if he was sorry for him, calling his attention to a dish or a wine which, he seemed to say, it would be a pity for him to miss—it might prove a consolation to him.

Our agony became so unbearable that the women ended it when they could by leaving us at the stage of coffee and cigarettes. Then, with us three men the position became untenable, and Reggie found that he'd have to go out at nine; he had an appointment with a fellow. And at nine he went.

Viola and Jimmy left us very soon after.

She said, "It was dear of you to have us," not in the least humbly, but as if they had enjoyed it.

Up to the very last she was magnificent, and even Jimmy played up well. In fact, when Reggie's perfection was no longer there to damage him he was rather fine.

It was poor little Norah who broke down. I found her

crying all by herself on the couch in my study when they'd gone.

She said, "Wally, this is awful. It's *the* most awful thing that could have happened."

I said, "Oh, come—" and she persisted. "But it *is*. She adored Reggie. He used to adore her—and—you've seen him, how he was to-night. It'll kill her if he keeps it up."

I said, "He won't keep it up."

"Oh, won't he! You don't know Reggie."

I said, "It's odd. He didn't seem to mind Jimmy so much the first day he met him."

"Oh, my dear—he didn't mind, because he never could have dreamed she'd marry him."

"He'll come round all right when he knows him," I said.

She shook her head and made little dabs at her face with her pocket-handkerchief.

"That's just it. He thinks he does know him. I mean he thinks he knows something. I'm sure he thinks it."

"My dear child, however could he? He couldn't even have heard. If you mean that Belgian business, it was all over and done with four years ago. Have we any of us thought of it since?"

"No—but I think he had an idea then. He guessed that there must be something. You see—we never told Vee-Vee, but—he thought it was awfully queer of her to go off—anywhere—just when he was sailing."

"Well," I said, "it *was* a bit odd. She must have been awfully gone on Jimmy."

"She was."

"Poor dear. She said she meant to burn her boats."

"Don't you see—that was part of the burning. She had to break the hold that Reggie had on her. You don't

know what it was like, Wally. She had to break it or she could never have married Jimmy at all. It was a toss-up between them; and Jimmy won."

"Is it going to be a toss-up between them all over again, d'you think?" I said.

"No. It's going to be war to the knife. They won't either of them give in as long as Reggie's got that idea in his head."

"We must get it out of his head. Surely," I said, "we can do something."

"No, we can't. There's no way of getting it out. It's no good trying to make a joke of it. You can't joke with Reggie past a certain point. And it's not as if you could give him a hint. You can't hint at these things."

"What do you think he'll do?"

"He won't do anything. He won't say anything. He'll just go on like this all the time, and she won't be able to bear it. It'll break her heart."

Well, though I agreed with her, I still thought that something could be done. I tried to do it when Reggie got back that night after Norah had gone to bed. I couldn't of course assume that he had his idea. My plan was to present Jevons to him in a light that was incompatible with his idea. It was easy enough to say that Jevons might be rather startling, but that he was awfully decent and the soul of honour. The soul of honour covered it—absolutely ruled out his idea.

He didn't contradict me. He just sat there smoking amicably, just saying every now and then that he couldn't stand him; he was sorry—I might be perfectly right and Jevons might be everything I said—only he couldn't stand him; and he wasn't going to. Nothing would induce him to stop with Jevons. He didn't want to have anything to do with the little beast.

When I said, "I assure you, my dear fellow, it's all right," he only threw the onus of suspicion on me by replying suavely, "My dear fellow, I assure you I never said it wasn't."

It was as if he really knew it wasn't, knew something that we didn't know, and was determined to keep his knowledge to himself.

And when I'd finished he said, "The whole thing's a mystery to *me*. I thought she was going to marry you." And then—"How she can stick him I can't think. D'you mind, old man, if I go to bed? No, I don't want any whisky and soda, thanks."

It was Pavitt, of all people, who threw a light on it when he brought the whisky.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Pavitt, "but I believe I never told you that the Captain called here one day when you was in Belgium."

"Are you quite sure, Pavitt? He called the day I left."

"Yes, sir, I remember 'is calling the day you left. It's only just come back to me that he called again, three days after, I think it was. I told him you was gone to Belgium, and he said that was all he wanted. He didn't leave no message, else I should have remembered. It was the young gentleman's likeness to Mrs. Jevons, sir, what fixed him in my mind."

I told Reggie this the next day as an instance of Pavitt's wonderful memory. "Only," I said, "he forgot to tell me that you called."

He smiled rather bitterly as if he remembered the incident well.

"Oh, I called all right," he said. "I wanted to know where you were."

After that Norah and I made it out between us. Not

all at once, but bit by bit, as things occurred to us or as he suggested them.

He must have begun to suspect something when the time went on and Viola didn't turn up. Only he thought it was I who was at the bottom of it. Perhaps, so long as he thought it was I, he had made up his mind that there could be no great harm in it. He had been all right with her down at Canterbury those last few days. Anyhow, he hadn't said anything.

Then—when he heard that she had married Jevons—he had his idea. It wasn't necessary for him to have heard anything else. And then, even if he hadn't guessed it, there was Jimmy's book, the "Flemish Journal," to tell him she had been in Belgium with him. And he knew she didn't marry him till afterwards.

And so, he thought things. If he didn't think them of Viola he thought them of Jevons. (Even on the most charitable assumption he would consider his sister's passion for Jimmy a piece of morbid perversity.) And anyhow, he was left with an appalling doubt.

And he wasn't going to forgive either of them, ever.

IX

That we had made out something very like the truth of it I realized when I met Burton Withers. For eventually I did meet him. It was at the end of June, nineteen-ten, in the green room of the Crown Theatre on the hundredth night of Jimmy's play. That is what I remember it by.

Norah and I were with Viola and Jimmy. Withers had come in with a friend, an important member of the cast, who was evidently under the impression that we had never met before, for he introduced him to us all round. Withers showed tact in not recognizing Viola or claiming the acquaintance he certainly had with Jevons. He had, in fact, a most reassuring air of starting again with a clean slate and no reminiscences. This was in the interval between the First and Second Acts. When the curtain rose on Act Two, I was alone in Jimmy's box. (Jimmy and Viola and Norah were trying the effect of the play from the stalls.) And at the next interval Withers came to me there. It was funny, he said, the way little Jevons had come on. He didn't suppose any of us had thought of *this* four years ago when we had all met together in Bruges.

I said, "Did we all meet together in Bruges?"

"Well, if it wasn't in Ghent. Oh—of course it was at Ghent you and I met. You hadn't joined the others then."

At first I was hopelessly mystified by these allusions. I couldn't think what point he was making for or where he

would come out. He seemed to be trying uneasily to get somewhere. Then I saw that he had had it on his mind that when we had last met he had made a defamatory statement to me about the lady who had become my sister-in-law, and about a man who had become a celebrity (I knew Withers's little weakness for celebrities). And he was scared.

I must have seemed a bit lost among his allusions, for he blurted it out.

"D'you know, I've been most awfully sorry for chaffing you in that idiotic way—about—your sister-in-law. Silly sort of thing one says, you know. But of course you knew I was pulling your leg."

I said, "My dear Withers, of course I knew you were."

Of course I knew he was doing nothing of the sort, for Withers slandered right and left when it wasn't worth his while to grovel, and I had no doubt now that he believed his own dirty tale when he told it; but he had been impressed and thoroughly frightened, even at the time, by the calmness of my bluff, and the little beast was far more afraid of us than we ever could have been of him now. We could henceforth dismiss Withers from our minds. He was a "social climber" of the sort that would eat his own words if he thought they would do the smallest damage to his climbing.

As for the ladies, General Thesiger's friends, I rather think the General had settled with them at the time.

You might say we had nothing to fear from Reggie, if Reggie's silence—and his deafness—hadn't been more terrible than anything he could have heard or said.

I suppose nineteen-ten ought to stand as the year of Tasker Jevons's great Play, the play that ran for a whole year after the hundredth night, that ran on and on as if it would never stop, that, when it was taken off the Crown

stage to make room for its successor, still careered through the provinces and the United States. It seemed the year of Jimmy's utmost affluence. If he kept it up, we said, he'd be a millionaire before he died of it. But it wasn't conceivable that he could keep it up for long. We thought he'd never write another play like this one. There never would be another year like nineteen-ten.

I believe that even Jimmy thought there'd never be another year like it, so far had he surpassed his own calculations, as it was.

But for me nineteen-ten is the year of other things, the things that happened in the family, the year of Reggie's return and all the misery that came from it, the year of Viola's struggle—the agony of which we, Norah and I, were the helpless spectators. *She* never said a word to us. It was Norah who conveyed to me the secret, intimate shock of it.

That year Jimmy rained boxes and stalls and theatre-parties for his play on all the Thesigers (except Reggie) and on all their friends, and on Dorothy and Gwinny and their husbands when they came back from Simla and Gibraltar (it was the year of their return too); but we stood behind the scenes of a tragedy that mercifully was hidden from Jimmy's eyes. It was the year when Mildred broke off her engagement to Charlie Thesiger. It was the year when our little girl, Viola, was born; the year when we moved from our Bloomsbury flat into the little house in Edwardes Square, taking over the end of the lease and all the fixtures and some of the furniture from Jimmy. Jimmy hadn't a child, and he had sworn that he never would have one; he was so afraid (and this fear was the only thing that disturbed his optimism), so horribly afraid that Viola might die. But he had outgrown the house in

Edwardes Square. It was the year of his first really startling expansion.

It was the year when he moved into the house in Mayfair.

Why Mayfair we really couldn't think. He said he liked the sound of it; it made him feel as if he was in the country when he wasn't, and as if it was the month of May, when there never was any month of May in England; as if there were a maypole where the fountain is in Park Lane; and as if processions, and processions of horses, splendid stallions and brood-mares and thoroughbreds and hacks and great Suffolk punches with their manes and tails tied up with ribbons were coming past his house to the fair.

He may have felt like that about it. I put no limits to Jimmy's imagination; but I suspected him of throwing out these airy fancies as a veil to cover the preposterous nature of his ambition.

It was also the year when he began to talk about motor-cars and think about motor-cars and dream about motor-cars at night.

And it was the year in which he and Viola went to the Riviera while the plumbers and painters were at work on the house in Green Street, Mayfair. They stayed away all autumn, and at the end of November they settled in. And at Christmas they gave their house-warming.

It wasn't a large party—only a few friends of Viola's, and Jimmy's lawyer and his doctor and his agent, and a few picked members of the confraternity; the rest were Thesigers. If Jimmy had meant to give a demonstration proving that he could gather the whole of his wife's family round him at a pinch, he had all but succeeded. I suppose every available member had turned up that night, except Reggie. The General and his wife and daughters

were there; and Charlie Thesiger and Bertie; and Canon and Mrs. Thesiger (they had come up from Canterbury on purpose, and were staying with the General); and Dorothy and Gwinny and their husbands; and Victoria and Mildred, who stayed with Viola; and Millicent, who came to us; and a whole crowd of miscellaneous aunts and cousins; perhaps sixty altogether, counting outsiders.

Norah and I had been away for weeks in the country and had only got back that afternoon, so we had not seen the house in Green Street since it had been furnished. It burst, it literally burst, on us, without the smallest warning or preparation.

Like Jimmy's first novel, it was designed to startle and arrest, hitting you in the eye as you came in. The actual reception was held in the large hall, which had been formed by turning what had once been the dining-room loose into the passage and the stair-place.

So far the architect had done his work well. After that he had been left to struggle with and interpret as he best could the baronial idea that had been imposed on him. The hall was panelled half-way in dark oak, and above the oak the walls were hung with a rough papering of old gold. But what hit you in the eye as you came in was the oak staircase that went up royally along the bottom wall. It had scarlet-and-gold Tudor roses on the flank of the balustrade, and at every third banister there was a shield picked out in scarlet and gold. And at the bottom of the balustrade and at the turn a little oak lion sat on his haunches and held up yet another shield (picked out in scarlet and gold) in his fore-paws. The bare oak planks of the upper floor made the ceiling, and there was an enormous Tudor rose in the middle of it, where other people might have had a chandelier, and little Tudor roses blazed at intervals all along the cornice. And there was a great stone

hearth and chimney-piece, a Tudor chimney-piece, mullioned, with a shield carved in the centre and the motto: *"Dominus Defensor Domi,"* and on either side the rose and the grill, the rose and the grill, alternately. There were andirons on the hearth and an immense log burning, and swords and daggers and suits of armour hung on the gold walls above the panelling.

And I swear to you that the curtains and upholstery were in tapestry cloth, the lilies of France in gold on a crimson ground. It was as if Jimmy had wanted to say to the Thesigers that if it came to being Tudor, he could be as Tudor as any of them, and more so. Thus deeply had he absorbed the Canterbury atmosphere.

When she saw the suits of armour Norah squeezed my arm and breathed "Oh—my *darling* Wally!"—in an ecstasy that was anguish. Poor Mildred's plump face turned as scarlet as the Tudor roses with an emotion that we could not fathom, but judged to be painful.

We had come early with the idea of making ourselves useful, if necessary; but there was hardly anybody there yet, only two or three guests drinking coffee or champagne-cup at the long table under the windows, and Jimmy, who stood in the middle of his Tudor hall, talking to one of the confraternity, and rocking himself gently from his toes to his heels and from his heels to his toes again, as a sign that he was not in the least elated, but only at his ease.

He was delighted to see us, and for quite three seconds he ceased his rocking and began to twinkle in a most natural and reassuring manner. Then I remember him scuttling away to greet another guest, and the *confrère* gazing after him with affection and turning to us in a sort of grave enjoyment of the scene. I remember Viola coming up to us and her little baffling smile and her look—the

look she was to have for long enough—of detachment from Jimmy and his Tudor hall. I remember the dark blue, half-transparent gown she wore that was certainly not Tudor, and her general air of being an uninvited and inappropriate guest, and how she conveyed us to the table to get drinks "all comfy" before the others came. And when Viola had drifted away, I remember Charlie Thesiger strolling up to us. The supercilious youth had been getting a drink "all comfy" on his own account, and his little stiff moustache was still wet with Jimmy's champagne-cup above the atrocious smile he met us with.

He asked us if we'd seen the drawing-room.

We said we hadn't, and he advised us to go up and look at it at once, before anybody else did. "You can't see it properly," he said, "unless you're alone with it."

I suppose we ought to have been grateful to Charlie for not letting us miss it, and it was perfectly true that the way to see it was to be alone with it; there would, indeed, have been a positive indecency in seeing it in any other way. He had spared our decency. And yet I think we hated him for having sent us there. It was as if he had sent us to look at something horrible, at an outrage, at violence done to shrinking, delicate things.

We looked at it, and we looked at each other. We didn't speak, and I don't think either of us smiled. I remember Norah going behind me and closing the door swiftly, as she might have closed it on some horror that she and I had to deal with alone. I remember her saying then, "This is *too* awful!" not in the least as if she meant what we were looking at, but as if she saw something invisible that lurked and loomed behind it, so that I asked her what she thought it meant.

"It means," she said, "that Jimmy's done it all himself. He's had to do it all himself. She hasn't *cared*."

I said it looked as if *he* hadn't cared.

She moaned, "Oh, but he did—he did. He's cared so awfully. That's the dreadful part of it. You can see he has. Just look at those vases and those cabinets and things. And think of the money the poor thing must have spent on it!"

"But," I said, "it's so unlike him. His taste for furniture's impeccable. The old house was perfect. So, in its way, was the cottage."

"I'm afraid that wasn't Jimmy's taste—it was Vee-Vee's. She did everything."

"She told us *he* did."

"Poor darling—she wanted us to think he did."

"He appreciated it, anyhow."

"He'd appreciate anything if she did it."

"Then," I said, "why should he break loose like this now?"

"Because she hasn't cared. She hasn't cared a hang. She's left everything to him. And you can see, poor dear, how he's spread himself."

Oh, yes, you could see. It was as if he had never had scope before, and now, with no limit to his opportunity, he had simply run amok. It wasn't that the things he had gathered round him in his orgy were not fine things. It was the awful way he'd mixed them, yielding incontinently to each solicitation as it came along. Dealers had been on the look-out for Jimmy to exploit his fury.

In his Tudor hall he had been constrained to unity by a great idea. But not here. And reminiscences of the Canterbury drawing-room had suggested to him that you *could* mix things. So, using a satinwood suite with tinted marqueterie and old rose upholsterings (he had succumbed to it in the first freshness of his innocence) as a base, he had added Boule cabinets and modern Indian tables in

carved open-work to Adams cabinets and Renaissance tables in ebony inlaid with engraved ivory, and eighteenth-century gilded bergère chairs to old oak and Chippendale. Cloisonné and Sèvres stood side by side on the same shelf. He had an Aubusson carpet in the middle of the floor, and his Bokhara rugs at intervals down the sides. Norah was sitting on the emerald-green brocade of an Empire sofa, clutching the gilt sphinx head of the arm-end. It was a double room, and emerald-green curtains hung at the tall windows in the front and at the large stained-glass window at the back, and at the wide archway between. And an Algerian lamp swung from the back ceiling, and an Early Victorian glass chandelier from the front.

"And the awfullest thing of all is," Norah was saying, "that he's done it to please her."

"Don't believe her. That's the beautiful part of it."

Viola had come in by the door of the back room and she was smiling at us.

Yet, even as she smiled, she had that look of being detached, of not caring.

We couldn't say anything—we were too miserable. She looked round the dreadful rooms as if she were trying to see them for the first time, as if some reverberation of the horror we had felt did penetrate to her in her remoteness. She smiled faintly.

"What *does* it matter," she said, "so long as it makes him happy? It would be sweet if you'd come down and help us now."

We went down, and the house-warming began.

It was Jimmy who told us what our business was. We were to stand by visitors, he said, as they came in and break the shock (he had observed it) of the Tudor hall. If we couldn't break it we must do what we could to help

recovery. He had seen desperate cases yield to champagne-cup administered during the first paroxysm.

We had a little trouble with some of the minor confraternity—their emotions were facile and champagne intensified them. They would ask where the throne-room was and when our host was going to be measured for his suit of armour, and what did we think he'd done with the family portraits?

But the Thesigers (all except Charlie—and Charlie, Norah said, had no heart), the Thesigers offered an example of the most beautiful manners. I shall never forget the General's face as the suits of armour struck him—his sudden spasm of joy and the austere heroism that suppressed it. And the Canon——

The Canon rose to even greater heights. We were a bit afraid that he would overdo it and look as if he were trying to show us how a Christian gentleman could bear such things as Jimmy's furnishings. But no. He behaved as though he saw nothing in the least unusual in his furnishings, as though Jimmy's Tudor hall and miscellaneous drawing-room were his natural background.

But for sheer pluck and presence of mind not one of them could touch Jevons. He rose, he soared, he poised himself, he turned and swept above them; you could feel the tense vibration that kept him there, in his atmosphere of deadly peril. He vol-planed, he looped the loop. *His* behaviour was unsurpassable. For *his* case, if you like, was desperate. I tell you he had seen the effect of his Tudor hall and drawing-room. He had been watching; and nothing, not a murmur, or a furtive snigger, not the quiver of an eyelash, had escaped him. And consider what it meant to him. In a furious climax of expenditure he had achieved the arresting spectacle of his house in Mayfair, and his first night, his house-warming, was

turning under his eyes into a triumph for the Thesigers' manners and a failure for him. He had no illusions. Unless he did something to stop it, the whole thing would be one enormous and lamentable and expensive failure.

He had to do something. And he did it. He left off his uneasy swagger and his rocking. He met the heroic and beautiful faces of the Thesigers with his engaging twinkle. He sought out and ministered to two young girls who had been brought there by the minor confraternity and were hiding in a corner on the point of hysteria. We heard him telling them that the throne-room was being built out over the scullery leads (he must have known what the minor confraternity had been up to), that in the great fireplace in his kitchen you could roast three journalists whole, and that the question of the family portraits was receiving his attention. He had a deal on with the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery for the purchase of the Holbein Henry the Eighth. By the time he had finished it was open to us to suppose that the house in Mayfair was his joke and not ours, that he had furnished it in this preposterous manner in order to be really and truly funny, and to keep himself and Viola in perfect and perpetual gaiety. It was as if he were trying to say to us, "None of you people—least of all the confraternity—knows how to live. Life isn't a calamity; it's a joke; and to live properly you should meet life in its own spirit; you should do exuberant and gay and gorgeous things, like me."

And then when we had all come round, he rearranged all the furniture in his drawing-room for charades (showing no respect whatever for his satinwood suite); and after the charades he rolled up his Aubusson carpet and cleared the place for a dance that was ruin to his parquet floor.

And we had supper; and then more dancing till four o'clock in the morning.

Of the dancing I remember nothing but Viola whirling round and round, as it were for ever, in Charlie Thesiger's arms, and her dead-white face looking over his shoulder, as if she saw nothing, nothing whatever; as if she were detached even from the arms that held her.

My last recollection is of Jimmy's face when Norah said to him, "Oh, Jimmy, I *love* your dear little lions!"—and Jimmy's answer:

"Little lions—yes—they make me feel tall and majestic."

"He *is* going it, isn't he?" said Charlie Thesiger.

At this point, when I look back over what I've written, it seems to me that I've done nothing but record changes so many and so marked that their history has no sort of continuity. But in reality it was not so. Up to December, nineteen-ten, there was no break, not even a dividing line. Compared with what happened then I am compelled to think of Viola's marriage, not as a risky experiment that had so far defeated prophecy, but as an entirely serene and happy thing. Between the moment when they set up that four-post bed in that absurd little house in Hampstead and the day of their leaving Edwardes Square behind them I cannot point to any time and say, "That was the beginning of it," or put my finger on an event and show the difference there.

Unless it was Reggie's coming back.

But the results of that didn't appear till later.

Any difference I may have noted previously was an affair of shades, of delicate oscillations. There was no lapse without a recovery, no departure without a return.

And here, at the end of nineteen-ten, I got a line drawn

sharply on either side of a break I cannot bridge. The minute Jimmy moved into that house in Mayfair things began to go wrong.

It was as if Jimmy, in his love of doing risky things, had cast, this time, a dreadful die.

From that evening onward I watched them with anxiety. I do not know how far Jevons was aware that the house in Mayfair was a blunder; I think he wouldn't have acknowledged that it was a blunder at all. His own attitude to it was not in the least disturbed by his humorous perception of other people's. With his dexterity in adjustments he was quite capable of reconciling them, quite capable of enjoying the effect it had on nervous organisms while he himself took it seriously. It was, after all, his own achievement, and a very astonishing achievement too. He continued to respect it as the immense sign of his material prosperity, the advertisement, you may say, of his arrival. His business instinct would never have allowed him to repent of an advertisement.

There *was* this gross element in his enjoyment.

And there was also the pure and charming happiness of a child that suddenly finds itself left, with boundless opportunity, to its own gorgeous caprice. You could no more blame Jevons for the bad taste of his drawing-room and his Tudor hall than you could blame a child for its joy in a treasure of tinsel and coloured glass.

But when we asked ourselves where, in this outbreak of Jimmy's fantasy, did Viola come in, we had to own that she came in nowhere. Not only had she stood by without lifting a finger to interfere with its tempestuous course; not only had she submitted without a protest; she seemed to show no adequate sense of what had happened. Her detachment was the unnatural and dreadful thing.

And this happiness of his was at Viola's mercy. It

would last just so long as she could keep him from knowing that he had outraged the beauty, the fitness and the simplicity she loved. I thought how he had once boasted that he knew what she wanted, that he knew what she was thinking and feeling all the time. How could he have imagined that she wanted *this?* What was his knowledge worth if he didn't know what she would think and feel about it?

Unless, indeed, she had lied to him. Lied from first to last, deliberately and consummately, over each separate thing and over all the pretentious silliness and waste of it. Norah declared that it was so, and it looked like it. And more than anything it showed where my poor Viola had got to. It was so unlike her to lie, so unlike her to stand aside, where you would have thought she would have most wanted to plunge in; the calculation and the indifference both were so beyond her that you could only think one thing: she hated it; she hated the new turn his prosperity had taken; she almost hated him because of it; and her heart was broken because of Reggie, and it was hardening where it broke; she hated Reggie at moments; and she had moments of hating Jevons because he had come between them; and she was compounding with her conscience, punishing herself for all these hatreds and for a thousand secret criticisms and disloyalties and repugnances; avenging, as it were beforehand, all hatreds and criticisms, disloyalties and repugnances to come. For she saw it all now —how it was going to be. And she was trying to make up for it by giving Jimmy his own way in the things that, as she had said, "didn't matter."

And if Jimmy's way was to surround her with pretentious silliness instead of beautiful simplicity, then she must rise above her surroundings. Her spirit, at any rate, must refuse to be surrounded.

Her attitude was more lofty than you can imagine. As Norah had said, there would always be a Belfry—something high and unusual—in Viola's life. Well, she was going to live in the Belfry, that was all. And if she was to be perfectly safe in her Belfry, and Jimmy perfectly happy in his Tudor hall, he mustn't know that she was there.

I don't know how she really put it to herself; I don't suppose she "put" it any way; but subconsciously, as they say, it must have been like that. Anyhow, her behaviour amounted to an evasion of Jimmy, and this particular evasion was sad enough when you consider that in the beginning it had been Jimmy who had taken her to look at the Belfry—who was the one man who could be trusted to take her, and that she would never have dreamed of setting off on such an adventure by herself, and that she wasn't fitted for it. In fact, I can't think of anybody less fit.

It showed more than anything how the glamour must have worn off him.

It had worn off even for us to whom he came each time with a comparative freshness. And if it hadn't worn off for his public and for the confraternity, it was simply because as an engineer of literature he was inexhaustible. He had so perfected his machinery that the turning out of novels and of plays had become with him a sort of automatic habit, and if there was any falling off in his quality he was right when he said that nobody but himself would find it out. He had got an infinite capacity for plagiarizing himself; and in his worst things he imitated his best so closely that he might well defy you to tell the difference.

But you cannot work as he had worked for five years at a stretch and not suffer for it. And you cannot aim at material success as he had aimed, deliberately and con-

tinuously, for five years without becoming yourself a bit material. And you cannot be immersed and wallow in it as he wallowed without corruption.

There's no doubt that for the next two—three—four years he wallowed. He was so deep in that, even after Viola's illness that came in nineteen-thirteen and purged him somewhat, he continued to wallow. And we had to stand by while he was doing it and pretend that we weren't shocked. There was no good trying to give him a hand to help him out, he was so happy wallowing.

I am far from blaming him. Personally, if it hadn't been for Viola, I should have liked to think that he was able to get all that ecstasy out of his sordid triumph. For it *was* sordid. If it wasn't for Viola you could tick off each year with a note of his preposterously increasing income, and say that was all there was in it.

I muddle up the first years of it. I know that in nineteen-eleven he brought out his fifth novel and his third play and that the run and the returns of both were astounding, even for him. I know that in nineteen-twelve he brought out two novels and two new plays that ran at the same time, and that he roped in Europe and the Colonies; and that his income rose into five figures. He couldn't help it. His business was a thing that had passed beyond his control. With infinite exertions he had set it spinning, and now it looked as if he had only to touch it now and then with his finger to keep it going. And if he did get a bit excited is it any wonder? There was the dreadful fascination of the thing that compelled him to watch it till its perpetual gyrations went to his head and made it reel.

His figure seems to me to reel slightly as it moves through those rooms in the house in Green Street, and before the footlights as he answered calls, and across

the banquet-halls of the "Ritz" or the "Criterion" or the "Savoy," when—about three times a year—he celebrated his triumphs. I see those years as a succession of banquets running indistinguishably into each other. I see him buying more and more furniture and superintending its disposal with excitement. He seems to me to have been always buying things. I've forgotten most of them except the things he bought for Viola—the jewellery that frightened her, the opera cloak that made her hysterical, the furs that had to be sent back again (you'd have thought he couldn't have gone wrong with furs, but he did), and the hats that even Jimmy owned it was impossible to wear. I can see his face saddened by these failures and a little puzzled, as if he couldn't conceive how his star should have gone back on him like that. I can see him, and I can see Viola, kneeling on the floor in his study and packing some beastly thing up in paper, tenderly, as if it had been the corpse of a beloved hope; and I can hear him saying (it was after the opera cloak and the hysterics), "Walter, you can monkey with a woman's 'eart, and you can ruin her immortal soul, but if you meddle with her clothes it's hell for both of you. Don't you do it, my boy."

I remember scores of little things like that, things done and things said with an incorruptible sweetness and affection, but things accentuated with lapsed aitches and with gestures that only Jimmy was unaware of. Those years are marked for me more than anything by the awful increase in his solecisms. Their number, their enormity and frequency rose with his income, and for the best of reasons. It was as if, his object being gained, he could afford them. He was no longer on his guard. He had no longer any need to be. The strain was over—he relaxed, and in relaxation he fell back into his old habits.

All those years we seem to have been looking on at the slow, slow process of his vulgarization. By nineteen-twelve the confraternity had begun to regard Tasker Jevons as an outrageous joke. And in nineteen-thirteen, when both his plays were still running, even his father-in-law said that he was a disgusting spectacle. And Reggie (he was Major Thesiger now, with a garrison appointment at Woolwich) Reggie kept as far away from him as ever.

Sometimes I have thought that Viola's detachment helped his undoing. She wasn't there to pull him up or to cover his disasters; she had more and more the look of not being there at all.

And Charlie Thesiger was always there. There with a most decided look of being up to something.

Jevons didn't seem to mind him. You might have said that Charlie was another of the risks he took.

X

In nineteen-thirteen Jimmy bought a motor-car.

He was more excited about his motor-car than he had been about his house—any of his houses. Even Viola was interested and came rushing down from her Belfry when it arrived.

He bought it at the end of January. A good, useful car that would shut or open and serve for town or country. But it was no good to them till April.

For all February and March Viola was ill. She had been running down gradually for about two years, getting a little whiter and a little slenderer every month, and in the first week of February she got influenza and ignored it, and went out for a drive in the motor-car with a temperature of a hundred and four.

Nineteen-thirteen stands out for me as the year of Viola's illness.

It turned to pneumonia and she was dangerously ill for three weeks, in fact, she nearly died of it; and for more weeks than I can remember she lay about on sofas to which Jimmy and the nurse or one of us carried her from her bed. And in all that time Jimmy nursed and waited on her and sat up with her at night. If he slept it was with one eye and both ears open. And I never saw anybody as gentle as he was and as skilful with his hands and quiet. He didn't even breathe hard. And when she was convalescent and a little fretful and troublesome there wasn't anybody else who could manage her.

The nurses would call him to feed her and give her her medicine and lift her. She couldn't bear anybody else to touch her.

I remember one day when she had been moved from her bed to the couch for the first time and she was so weak, poor darling, that she cried. I remember her saying, "Jimmy, if you'll only put your hands on my forehead and keep them there."

I think he must have sat for hours with his hands on her forehead.

I doubt if he was ever away from her for more than a few minutes except when one of us came and dragged him out for a walk in the Park against his will. It was always for a walk in the Park—the same walk, through Stanhope Gate to the end of the Serpentine and back again, so that he could time it to a minute. He wouldn't look at his motor-car. I think he hated it. Anyhow, I know he lent it to us until she was well enough to go out in it again.

She wasn't well enough till April. She never would have been well enough, she never would have been with us at all, the doctors and the nurses said, if it hadn't been for Jimmy. He swore that they were fools when they gave her up and said she couldn't live. He said he'd *make* her live. And I believe he made her.

He gave her till April to get well in; and when April came she did get well. And he took her away to the South of France, and to Switzerland when the months grew warmer (the doctor told him it was a risk, but he said he'd take it); he took her in the motor-car, and he brought her back in June, still slender but recovered.

That illness of hers saved them for the time. It reinstated him. It improved him. He couldn't, you see, be devoted and vulgar at the same time. All lighter agitations and excitements might be dangerous to Jevons, but

passion and great grief and grave anxiety ennobled him. He came back from Switzerland chastened and purified of all offence. Even Reggie couldn't have found a flaw in him.

That had always been Jevons's way. Just when you had made up your mind that you couldn't bear him he would go and do something so beautiful that it made your heart ache. From the very fact that he was intolerable to-day you might be sure he'd be adorable to-morrow.

And when we saw him the night he brought Viola home, moving quietly about the house, giving orders in that gentle voice that he had in reserve, we thought, Really, it will be all right now. Viola's passion for him had been near death so many times, and each time he had saved it.

We hadn't allowed for the reaction—he was bound to feel it after three months' unnatural repression; we hadn't allowed for the reaction that Viola was bound to feel after three years' unnatural detachment; we hadn't allowed for the state of her nerves after her illness; there were all sorts of things we hadn't allowed for, and they all came at once; they burst out from under their covers one evening in June when Norah and I were dining in Green Street.

It was one of Jimmy's gestures that began it. Viola had never been able to control his gestures; she had never been able to get used to them; and there were two in particular that made her wince still as she had winced in the beginning. She had contracted the habit of wincing in response to them. Whenever Jimmy jerked his thumb over his shoulder you saw her blink; and whenever he cracked his knuckles she shrank back. The blink followed the jerk, and the shrinking followed the cracking as the flash follows the snap of the trigger.

I have never known Jimmy jerk as he jerked that evening. When Norah had no salad, when my glass was

empty, when Viola wanted more potatoes, when he wanted more potatoes himself, Jimmy jerked his thumb. The butler seemed to have made it a point of honour to acknowledge no other signal. And every time it happened I noticed the increasing violence of Viola's reaction. What had once been a gentle flicker of the eyelashes was now a succession of spasms that left her eyebrows twisted.

And at the fifth jerk she covered her eyes with her hands and cried out, "Jimmy, if you do that *once* more I shall scream."

Poor Jimmy asked innocently, "What did I do?"

"You jerked your thumb. You jerked it five times, and I simply cannot bear it."

"All right—*all* right," said Jimmy. "I needn't jerk it again. It's quite easy not to."

"I was afraid it wasn't," she sighed.

I was thinking, "Whatever will she do if he cracks his knuckles?" and that very minute he cracked them. The butler, demoralized by Jimmy's methods, had gone out of the room just when he was wanted. That annoyed Jimmy. I have never known him produce such a detonation.

Viola started as if he had hit her. But she said nothing this time.

Jimmy didn't see her. He was looking over his shoulder to see whether the butler was or was not answering his summons. And then—I think that at one period of his life he must have been a little proud of his accomplishment—he did it again. He did it *crescendo, fortissimo, prestissimo, strabato* and *con molto expressione;* he played on his knuckles with a virtuosity of which I have never seen the like.

The sheer technique of the performance ought to have disarmed her. (It enchanted Norah. But then Norah hadn't had an illness.) She flung a wild look round the

room as if she called on treacherous heavenly powers to save her, then rose and very slowly, in silence and a matchless dignity, she walked out, past me, past Jimmy, past the returning butler, and down the passage and into the Tudor hall.

"Well—I *am* blowed," said Jevons.

Norah put her hand on his arm.

"You were wonderful, Jimmy dear," she said. "I could have listened to you for ever. So could Walter. But then, we haven't any nerves."

"After all," said Jimmy, "what *did* I do?"

I said, "You made a most infernal noise, old chap, you know."

"I say! *Come*——"

We had heard the andirons go down with a clatter.

That was how we knew she was in the Tudor hall.

He found her there when he trotted out and took her some wine and a peach. He came back almost instantly.

"It's all right," he said. "She's eating it."

But it was very far from all right.

All the prisoned storms and the secret agonies of years were loose that night, and they had their way with her.

We found her dreadfully calm when we got back to her. She had peeled her peach and eaten it, and she had drunk her wine, and she was sitting by the great hearth where she had kicked down the andirons; she was sitting, I remember, on one of the Tudor chairs with the carved backs and the tapestry—the lilies of France in gold on a crimson ground—sitting very upright, in her beautiful trailing gown that curled round her feet; and she was a little flushed (but that may have been the wine).

Jimmy went and stood next her in front of his hearth, with his hands in his trouser pockets—I mean with his

thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, where he seemed to have put them to keep them out of mischief; and he twinkled as if he were still thinking of the andirons. And every now and then he glanced at his wife sideways out of his brilliant sapphire eyes, without moving his head a hair's-breadth.

And none of us said anything.

Then Jimmy rang for coffee, and that started her.

She said, "Are you going to do any work to-night?"

"No," said Jimmy, "I don't think so. Why?"

"Because, if you don't want your study I'll sit in it."

"All right." He said it vaguely. But he must have suspected something was up, for he turned his head round and looked at her straight; and again he said, "Why?"

"Because," she said, "it's the only tolerable room in the house."

He flushed faintly at this. "You mean," he said, "it's the only one I didn't bother about?"

"I *said* it was the only tolerable one."

"I see." His flush went deep, and his mouth closed over his teeth.

There was no doubt he saw.

She had hurt him badly. It was quite a minute before he spoke again, and when he did speak you felt that he had yielded, in spite of himself, to an overpowering curiosity. He must—he seemed to be saying to himself—sift this mystery to the bottom.

"D'you mean," he said, "that *this* room doesn't—er—appeal to you? What's wrong with it?"

"There's nothing wrong with it," she said, "if you like it."

"Never mind whether I like it or not. It's detestable. *And* the drawing-room?"

She did not answer. I think she was ashamed of herself.

"Even more so, I suppose. And—your boudoir?"

(I've forgotten the boudoir. She hardly ever let any of us go into it. It was pretty awful.)

"I do wish," she said, "you'd leave me alone. What *does* it matter?"

"Your boudoir," he went on, as if she hadn't said anything, "is, if possible, more detestable than the drawing-room."

"I never said so."

"Precisely. That's my grievance. Why, in Heaven's name, didn't you say so? Why did you tell me that you *liked* all these abominations?"

"Because they didn't matter."

"Why lie about them if they didn't matter?"

"I mean they didn't matter to me. They don't."

"My dear child, what on earth do you suppose they matter to me? What made you think they mattered?"

"The way you went on about them."

"Oh—the way I go on—Well, if *that* matters——"

She rose. I think she had heard the tinkle of the coffee-cups in the corridor and wanted to put an end to what in any hands but Jimmy's would have been an unseemly altercation.

"Will it matter if we go upstairs?"

"No. Not a bit." He snapped and twinkled at the same time.

She went, and Norah followed her.

Jevons settled himself in an armchair. I saw how unperturbed and deliberate he was as he took his coffee from the tray, and with what an incorrigible air he jerked his thumb towards the staircase. I can still hear him call up the staircase in a magisterial voice, "The ladies are

in the study, Parker." When we were alone he fell into meditation.

It was apparently as the result of meditation that he said, "I suppose it *is* a bit crude, if you come to think of it. Only why couldn't she say so at the time?"

I said I supposed she was afraid of hurting his feelings.

"My feelings? How could I have any feelings about a blanketty drawing-room suite? Does she really think I'm such a fool that I can't live without lions on my staircase? I stuck the beastly things there because I thought she'd like 'em. If I thought she'd like a tame rhinoceros in her boudoir I'd have got her one, if I'd 'ad to go out and catch 'im and train 'im myself. If I thought *now* that the only way to preserve her affection was to wear that suit of armour every night at dinner I'd wear it and glory in wearing it. There isn't any damned silly thing I wouldn't do and glory in."

And then—"Her nerves must be in an awful state."

He meditated again.

"Tell you what—I'll get rid of this place. I'll let it go furnished for what it'll fetch. I'll only keep the things we had before—the things she liked. They *are* prettier."

He looked round him with his disenchanted eyes.

"I can see it's all wrong, this sort of thing. It's in bad taste. Rotten bad taste. I suppose I must have been a bit excited about it at the time—I must have thought it was all right or I couldn't have stood it.

"It's a phase I've gone through.

"I can understand perfectly well how she feels about it.

"Fact is, I hate the place myself—the whole beastly house I hate. I've hated it ever since she was ill in it. I can't get away from her illness. I shall always see her ill. She'll be ill again if we go on living in it.

"I'm tired of the whole business—I'll let it to-morrow and take a house in the country.

"You might go upstairs, old man, and see what she's doing."

I went upstairs.

She was sitting in one corner of the study with a book in her hand pretending to read. Norah was sitting in another corner with a book in her hand, pretending to read. I gathered that Norah had been talking to her sister. I took up a book and pretended to read too.

Presently, when she thought we were absorbed, Viola got up and left us. Norah waited till the door had closed on her. Then she spoke.

"Wally—it's more awful than we've ever imagined. I don't think she'll be able to stand it much longer."

"Well," I said, "she won't have to stand it much longer. He's going to chuck the place. It's got on *his* nerves, too. He understands exactly how she feels about it."

"Let's hope he doesn't understand how she feels about—— It isn't the place, Wally."

"What is it, then?"

"I'm most awfully afraid it's Jimmy."

"Jimmy? You don't mean she doesn't care about him?"

"Oh, no, she cares about him, and it's because she cares so that she can't stand him."

"Well," I said, "whether she cares or not, it's rough on Jimmy."

"It's rough on her. It's rough on both of them. It's getting rougher and rougher, and it's wearing her out."

"Won't it wear him out too?"

"N-no. Nothing will wear Jimmy out. He's indestructible. He'll wear her out."

"He says he's going to take a house in the country. How do you think that'll answer?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know, Walter. I don't really know. It sounds risky."

"The whole thing," I said, "was risky from the start."

"There are two things," she said, "that would save them—if Reggie were to come round. Or if Jimmy were to have an illness; and neither of them is in the least likely to happen."

"There's a third thing," I said—"if Viola were to have a baby."

"That isn't likely either. He'd never let her. He says it would kill her. It's pitiful, it's pitiful. Can't you see," she said, "that he adores her?"

I said I didn't see what we were there for, and that it was time for us to go.

As I followed her down the stairs that led to the Tudor hall she paused suddenly on the landing where a second lion marked the turn. She had her finger to her lip. We drew back. But not before I had looked down over the balustrade into the hall and seen Jimmy sitting on one of the thrones with the lilies of France, and Viola crouching beside him on the rug with her head hidden on his knee.

He had his hands on her forehead and was saying, "It's all right. Do you suppose I don't understand?"

XI

It was late in August before Jevons found a country house large enough, yet not too large, and old enough, yet not too old—he would have nothing that even remotely suggested the Tudor period. And in the intervals of looking for his house he wrote another novel and two more plays. There was a decided falling-off in all of them, and I think Jevons himself was a little nervous. He said he'd have to be careful next time or they'd find him out. Once he had settled the affair of the house he would set to work and strengthen the position which, after all, he hadn't lost.

He had gained, if anything. Nineteen-thirteen stands as his year of maximum prosperity. Even the house in Mayfair justified itself when he let it, with all its principal rooms furnished, to an American railway magnate at a rent that enabled him to indulge the passion he had conceived for Amershott Old Grange.

He used to say he would never have been happy again if he couldn't have had Amershott Old Grange. Everything about it seemed propitious. They had found it by a happy accident when they weren't looking for it, weren't thinking of it, when they were trying to get out of Sussex and back to London after a long day's motoring in search of houses. Nothing that Essex or Kent or Buckinghamshire (Hertfordshire was ruled out by the presence in it of the Registrar) or Surrey or Hampshire or Sussex, so far, could do had satisfied them, and Jevons was beginning

to talk rather wildly about Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire and Wilts, and even Devon and Cornwall, when they lost their way in the cross-country roads between Midhurst and Petworth and so came upon Amershott Old Grange. It was hidden behind an old rose-red brick wall in a lane, and it was only by standing up in the motor-car that they caught sight of its long line of red-tiled dormer windows. The very notice-board was hidden, staggering back in an ivy bush that topped the wall.

"I won't have a house," said Jimmy, "that's a day older than Queen Anne." No more would Viola.

And the Old Grange was not a day older than Queen Anne or a day younger. It was the most perfect specimen of a Queen Anne house you could have wished to see—the long, straight front, the slender door, the two storeys with their rows of straight, flat windows and the steep brows of the dormers over them. It was all rose-red brick and rose-red tiles, with roses and clematis bursting out in crimson and purple all over the front. It stood at right angles to the wall and to the lane, and there was a long grass-garden in front of it, with walls all round and herbaceous borders under the walls; and from the high postern door in the outer wall opening to the lane a wide flagged path went all the way in front of the house to the door in the inner wall that led into the kitchen garden and the orchard. Further down the lane were the doors of the courtyard at the back of the house where the out-houses and the stables and the dovecot were; and beyond the courtyard there was a paddock, and you would have thought that was enough. But, besides his Queen Anne house and his gardens and his orchard and his courtyard and his dovecot and his paddock, Jimmy had acquired ten acres of moorland, to say nothing of a belt of pinewood that ran the whole length of his estate behind the kitchen

garden and the paddock and the moor. And the whole business of acquiring this property went without a hitch. He took it on the long tail-end of a lease from an impecunious landlord who couldn't afford to keep it up.

He obtained possession by September and in the early spring of nineteen-fourteen he was settled in Amershott Old Grange.

They furnished it as they had furnished the house in Edwardes Square, with the most complete return to beautiful simplicity.

Jimmy polished off a short novel and a play between October and June, and kept himself going on the proceeds of his old novels, his old plays, and his old short stories collected in a volume. Then I think he must have sat down to wait events.

For when we went down to stay with them we found him waiting. He was entirely prepared for certain contingencies. If anybody knew anything about English social conditions it was Tasker Jevons. He had calculated all the chances and provided for the ostracism that attends the inexpert invader of the country-side. He was aware that there were powers in and around Amershott that were not to be conciliated. The very fact that their territory lay so near the frontier (Amershott is only sixty-seven miles from London) kept them on their guard. To any good old county family, Tasker Jevons's celebrity was nothing, if it was not an added offence, and his opulence was less than nothing. In settling among them he ran the risk of being ignored. But when it came to ignoring, Jimmy considered that success lay with the party who got in first. So before he settled he took care to diffuse a sort of impression that the Tasker Jevonses were never at home to anybody, that it was not to be expected that a great novelist and playwright would have time for calling

and being called on, even if he had the absurd inclination. He had one solitary introduction in the neighbourhood, and he worked it very adroitly, not to obtain other introductions, but to spread the rumour of retirement and exclusiveness.

His arrival, preceded by this attractive legend, became an event. You couldn't even affect to overlook it. And if it was not possible for Jimmy to subdue his features to an expression of complete ignoring, he had got in so promptly with his attitude that it took the wind out of the sails of any people who were merely proposing to ignore.

Then, having come amongst them as a shy recluse, Jimmy began instantly to focus attention on himself. He hadn't been six weeks in the county before he had become the most conspicuous object in it.

I don't know how he did it; you never really caught him at it; and yet, when you came down to stay with him, you felt all the time that he was doing it; you felt a sort of shame (a shame that he couldn't feel) in seeing that he did it so perpetually and so well. He had a way of making his privacy a public thing. There was something positively indecent in his detachment; it advertised him as no possible immersion could have done. I've seen him lying out on his moor basking all by himself in the sun; I've seen him meditating all by himself in his pinewood; I've seen him sitting in his walled garden, with the apparatus of his business all about him, when you would have said that if ever a man's life was hidden and withdrawn it was Tasker Jevons's. And yet it wasn't. You knew it wasn't; and he knew that you knew. He knew that his gardener and his chauffeur and his butler and his cook and his housemaid and his parlourmaid knew that he was sitting in his garden writing, or meditating in his

pinewood or basking on his moor in the sun, and that their knowledge penetrated to every house in the village, to every house in the county within a radius of twenty miles. And when he was not doing any of these prominently tranquil things he was tearing about the country in his motor-car.

I have never seen anything like Jevons's motoring. It was in this new aspect of his that he was, I think, most remarkable. I say he made his privacy a public thing; but in the furious publicity of his motoring it was the other way round. He turned the public roads into a private track through paradise. I do not mean that he was a road-hog; far from it. He had the most exquisite manners of the road. He would slow down for a hen in the distance and upset himself into the ditch to avoid a rabbit. I have known him (with his first car) give a lift to any filthy tramp between Midhurst and Portsmouth. I mean that the act of motoring transported him; and he did these things instinctively, mechanically, without interruption to his rapture. Speed and the wind of speed, the air rushing by like a water-race as he ripped through it, the streaming past him of trees and hedges, the humming and throbbing of his engines, were ecstasy to Jimmy. He had learned to drive the thing, and his sense of power over it gave him the physical exaltation that he craved for. I believe that when he sat in his motor-car, driving it, he was filled, intoxicated, with the pride and splendour of life. He had power over everybody and everything that lay in his track, except other motor-cars; and he exulted in his knowledge that he could annihilate them and didn't. He enjoyed (voluptuously) his own mercy that spared them. Through his motor-car he attained such an extension of his personality that he became intolerable to other people and unrecognizable to himself.

And yet I do not think that even at the height of his ecstasy he ever really forgot that he was Tasker Jevons, the great novelist and playwright, in his motor-car. When he drove you through Portsmouth or Chichester, or even through little Midhurst, you felt that he thrilled from head to foot with self-consciousness. He knew and had acute pleasure in knowing that people noticed him as he went by; that the tradesmen turned out of their shops to stare after him; and that everybody said, "See that chap? That's Tasker Jevons. He always drives his own car."

He owned that he enjoyed it. I remember the first time we went down to stay with them (it was in May of nineteen-fourteen), when he was driving us through Midhurst from the station, how he said to us, "I'm glad I thought of living in the country. It makes me feel celebrated."

We asked him if he hadn't ever felt it before; and he answered solemnly, "Never for a minute. Never, I mean, like I do down here. In London, if you do gather a crowd round you, you're swallowed up in it. Besides, you can't always gather a crowd. D'you suppose, if I were to drive down Piccadilly in this car—short of standing on my head—I could attract the attention I've attracted to-day? You saw those fellows come out and look at me? Well—they do that pretty nearly every time, Furnival.

"No. London's no good. Too many houses—too many people—too many motor-cars. You can't stand out. What a man wants to set him off is landscape, Furny, landscape. You should see me on the goose-green at Amershott towards post-time."

Well, I did see him on the goose-green towards post-time, and I saw what he meant. It was really as if I'd never seen him before properly.

Heavens, how he stood out! It was as if a stage had been cleared for him, and for the figure he cut. He was quite right. You couldn't have done it in Piccadilly, or even in the suburbs. And he wasn't in his motor-car, mind you, then; he was simply strolling over from his house to post a letter in the village on the green, and I do not know how he contrived to infuse into so simple an act that subtle taint of advertisement. There was no necessity for him to post his own letters, he could easily have sent a servant. But I do believe he couldn't bear to miss the opportunity of being seen. When he passed the Vicarage, the Vicar and his wife and daughters were generally in their garden, and they turned to look at his passing, and he was exquisitely conscious of them. The villagers came out on to their doorsteps to look at him, and he was conscious of the villagers. The geese followed him in a long line across the common and stretched out their necks after him, and he was conscious of the geese. He enjoyed the publicity they gave him, and he said so.

And I began to wonder whether the funny frankness that had so disarmed us was really as funny as it looked (the idea of disarmament, you see, was serious), whether he didn't say these things because he knew we saw him as he really was; because he saw himself as he really was, and couldn't bear it; because there was no escape for him unless he could make believe that he was in fun when he really wasn't.

I do believe there was a time (any time before his Tudor period) when he *was* in fun, pure fun; and even through the Tudor period his enjoyment of himself was innocent. But as I walked home with him across his moor that evening it was borne in upon me that Jimmy's innocence was gone. Living in the country had killed it. I had

never perceived so definite a taint of vulgarity in him before.

You would have thought it would have been all the other way, that living in the country would have made altogether for simplicity and purity. I believe that quite honestly he had thought it would, that he had come into the country to be purified and simplified, and to put himself right with Viola for ever. And the horrid irony of it was that the country didn't do any of these things to him; it complicated him, it saturated him with that taint I've mentioned, and instead of putting him right it showed him up. Quite horribly and cruelly it showed him up. I do not think there was a single weakness or a single secret meanness that he had that didn't suddenly rise up and stand out on the background of Amershott.

All through that summer there, quite frankly, I detested Jevons. I believe that Norah came near detesting him, that she felt something very like contempt for him.

And if Norah felt it you may imagine what Viola would feel.

She was with us one evening (it was June, I think, and our second visit), when Jimmy showed most unmistakably the cloven hoof. We had come in from a long motor-drive, and he had made at once, as he always did, for the silver plate in the hall where cards left by callers were put, if any callers came. I can see him now, breathing hard. I can see the glance he cast at the cards, and the little jerky curb he put on his excitement—he had the grace to be ashamed of it. And then I see him holding four cards in his hand, sober and quiet and flushed like a man who has triumphed solemnly. And I hear him read out the names: "Lord Amerley, Lady Amerley, Lady Octavia Amerley, the Honourable Frances Amerley. *That's* all right. I gave them three months."

And I see Viola look at him, taking in his figure in its motor-dress, and his face, with the foolish, weak elation he couldn't for the life of him keep out of it.

Again I see him, with his little dreadful air of fervid solemnity—and I don't know whether I dreamed it or whether it was really there—very spruce and strutting about the lawns of Amerley Park at that garden-party they took us to.

And later on—in the very beginning of July it must have been—I see him on his own lawn at his own garden-party, and—I didn't dream it this time—he was really dreadful. Instead of carrying it off with the levity that had so often saved him from perdition, there was that revolting triumph about him and an uneasy eagerness, as if he knew that his triumph wasn't quite complete. But the garden-party was, as he would have said, all right. They were all there, those people he had given three months to. He had pulled it off precisely as he had schemed and calculated. Those legends of his detachment and his hermit habits had been worked so as to excite a supreme curiosity—and it was being satisfied.

And I cannot tell you whether he was really altered, or whether he had been like that all the time before Amershott had shown him up, and none of us had seen it except Viola.

Oh no—it's impossible. He *had* altered. If he had been like this we must have seen it. What Viola had seen —if she had seen anything—was only the foreshadowing, the bare possibility of this.

Charlie Thesiger was at that garden-party (he had retired from the service with the rank of Captain).

And it was at the garden-party that I first noticed a change in his manner to his cousin's husband. He used to treat Jevons with a certain superciliousness, and with

as much amusement, as much perception of his absurdity, as was possible for Charlie, who perceived so few things. Now I was struck with the correct young man's deference to his host. It was really as if it had at last dawned on Charlie that Jevons *was* his host, and that he had other claims to distinction as well. The more dreadful Jimmy was, the more courteous Charlie showed himself to Jimmy. And this in spite of the fact that Jevons had a way of treating Charlie as if he didn't matter, as if for all recognizable purposes he wasn't there.

When I spoke of this to Norah, she said that Viola had told him that if he couldn't be decent to Jimmy she wouldn't have him there.

Well, there he was, hanging about Viola from morning till night; he had any amount of time on his hands now, and he spent most of it at Amershott. He was there when we weren't sometimes, so that we couldn't keep track of him. But his purposes ought to have been apparent to us. I think it was partly because he was aware of them himself that he went out of his way to be decent to Jimmy, almost as if he were sorry for him beforehand.

For it was evident enough that Viola liked his being there, and liked to have him hanging round her. There was nothing about him that shocked or grated. I've no doubt he made himself entirely charming. His manners could be as beautiful as any of the Thesigers' when he chose, and they soothed her. I think she had ceased to feel them as a reproach to Jimmy. She had given up *his* manners, poor dear, long ago, as a bad job. It was as if she had slaked her thirst for the unusual. Some secret and strong revulsion had thrown her back on the people and the things that she had been brought up amongst and that she had run away from. When Jimmy jarred on her

she turned to Charlie for relief. And, after all, as Norah said, he was her cousin.

I don't think we either of us saw anything more in it than that. Without some such reaction she must have surrendered to Amershott. She couldn't defend Jevons against that showing up. She couldn't defend herself against those revelations, she could only stand by and look on at his enormity and shudder. Unless she had put her dear eyes out she must have seen that in the country he was not only a bounder but a snob. And she must have writhed in feeling that to see him that way was to be a bit of a snob herself. She had accused herself of snobbishness long ago, before she married him, when, in order to marry him, she had burned her boats.

What could she do? She couldn't put her eyes out. But I believe she would have been grateful to anybody who would have put them out for her.

I can't tell whether she was always unhappy. I rather think she had liked Amershott, the house and the garden and the pinewood and the bit of moor, and I am certain that she liked motoring almost as much as Jimmy did at first. She could even take pleasure in Jimmy's power over the car when they were alone with it in the open country, when his pleasure had no taint in it. I've heard her say, when he wanted to run down to Chichester or Portsmouth, "Oh, for Heaven's sake, let's go somewhere where nobody can look at us!"

She must have regarded the open country as the last refuge of his innocence. For her, more than for any of us, he had lost it.

How far he really lost it we shall never know. Even now, with all my lights, with that intense country light fairly beating on him, I can wonder: Am I saying these

things because I think them? Or because I believe I must have thought them then? And I cannot answer my own wonder. I remember how at Amershott, when I sat beside him in that car of his and watched his ecstasy, I used to pull myself up and say to myself, "You *know* he isn't like that. Look at him—what woolly lamb could be more simple and innocent than he is now?" And if anybody had come to me and asked me if I didn't think that Jevons *was* a little awful I should have said that if you were a little awful yourself you might think so, but not otherwise. My conscience has told me that as he became more successful I became more critical; it has even suggested that I may have been jealous of his success.

But that was in the days (they were comparatively innocent) of his first motor-car. Round that car there really is a light of romance and of adventure, a glamour that isn't at all the glamour of his opulence. In those days he did look upon a motor-car mainly as an instrument of pleasure, and not as a vulgar advertisement of his income. In June, at any rate, he was still the master of his car and not—as we saw him later on—its servant. There never was anything like that first fury of his motoring.

It couldn't last. He was wearing himself out. Those early excesses exhausted his capacity for pleasure, and when we came to stay with him in the last two weeks of July we found him apathetic about motoring.

But not about motor-cars. As far as the cars went he had developed into an incurable motor-maniac. He was never tired of talking about carburetters, and tyres, and petrol, and garages and gear. He dreamed of these things at night. Every day he invented some extraordinary contrivance for increasing speed and lessening friction. He

knew all that was to be known about the different kinds of cars; and he would roll their names on his tongue—Panhard and Fiat and Daimler and Mercédès and Rolls-Royce, as if the sound of them caressed him like music.

And the first car which he had mastered—it was a comparatively cheap one, but it wouldn't be fair to say what kind it was, for the poor thing had gone to pieces under his hand in six months; he had served her, his chauffeur said, something cruel—that first car had been sold for a hundred and fifty pounds, and Viola was mourning for it when we came down in July.

We couldn't think why she mourned, for he had bought another. We supposed that the new car had broken down, for we were met at Midhurst station by the local cab proprietor. But we were very soon to know that nothing had happened to the new car, and that something very serious indeed had happened to Jimmy.

He had gone mad—you can only call it mad—over his new car.

As soon as we had tea we were taken to see it where it stood in the coach-house that served as a garage.

It was a magpie car—the first, Jimmy told me, that had appeared down in that part of the country—white, with black bonnet and black splashboards, and black leather hood and cushions; so black that its body, in the matchless purity of its whiteness, staggered you. Anybody, Jevons said, could have an all-white car, and it wouldn't be noticed any more than a common taxi-cab. But one magpie in a countless crowd of cars annihilated all the rest. Lemon colour was good and so was scarlet; but for effect—for sheer destruction to other automobilists—there was nothing like a white car with black points. It was, Jimmy said and Kendal, the chauffeur, said, a perfect car. From their tone you wondered what you

had ever done that you should be allowed to approach and see it where it stood.

Where it stood, I say. You couldn't see that car doing anything else. It stood like an immense idol in a temple; and it looked as if all its life it never had done anything else but stand in its perfection to be stared at. And by its air of self-consciousness, of majesty, of arrogant power in repose, you gathered that it knew it was there to be stared at. The thing was drawn up at the far end of the garage, where no breath could blow on it, over an open pit. You knew that Kendal, the chauffeur, went down on a ladder into the pit to examine the secret being of the car; you knew it and yet it was incredible. You refused to believe that an outrage to which common cars were subject ever had been or would be perpetrated on this holy one. You would have said that no spot of mud or dust or rain had ever lighted on it; it might have descended into the garage out of heaven for any sign of travel that it showed. It was surrounded by I know not what atmosphere of consecration and immunity.

So that Norah's first question sounded like a profanity.

"What speed is it?" she said.

It might have been fancy, but I thought that Jevons's face underwent a change. I certainly saw Kendal the chauffeur looking at it.

"Speed?" he said. "Speed? Well—you *can* speed her up to sixty miles an hour if you want to." (He seemed to say, "If she ever is speeded up," or "You jolly well may want.")

He ran his hand lovingly along the car's white flank as if it were alive and could respond to the caress.

"She's a beauty," he said.

The chauffeur looked at him again.

"You won't want to knock her about like you did the last one, Mr. Jevons," he said.

And Jimmy's face expressed a sort of horror.

The chauffeur looked at us then, and, if you can wink without any motion of the eyelids, he winked. He saw, and he was trying to indicate to us, the state that Jevons had fallen into.

It was infatuation; it was idolatry; it was the most extraordinary passion I have ever known a man otherwise sane to be possessed by. You would have said that that creature with the black-and-white body and the terrific bowels of machinery had some sinister and magic power over him. He loved it; he worshipped it; he was afraid of it. And when you think of how, as the chauffeur said, he had "served" the other car——

Knock her about, indeed! He daren't take her out of the garage for a fifteen-mile run without agonies of apprehension. He never took her out at all unless he was certain that it wouldn't rain and that there wouldn't be any mud or any dust or any wind (I don't know what harm he thought the wind would do her). Instead of taking her out he would spend hours in the garage standing still and looking at her, stooping sometimes to examine her for a spot or a crack on her enamel, but always with reverence. I believe he never touched her without washing his hands first.

We had been at Amershott a week and we hadn't been out in that car three times, though the weather was perfect. Jimmy never could see that it was perfect enough. If it hadn't rained for two days he was afraid of dust; if it did rain he was afraid of mud; what he wanted was one light shower to lay the dust; and when he got it he was afraid of another shower coming. And on hot days he was afraid the sun might do something. And he was

afraid of *us* all the time lest we should ask him to take the car out on a day that wouldn't do.

I do not know how or why he had come to look on that car as his god. It wasn't, I do believe that it wasn't, because the thing was valuable, because he had sunk so much capital in that body and those engines (he had bought the most expensive kind of car you could buy). There was a sort of romance, a purity in his passion that redeemed it from the taint of grossness. It was the car's own purity, her unique and staggering beauty that had captivated him. And mixed with his passion there was the remorse and terror caused by the memory of his first car, the victim of his intemperance in motoring. He had evidently said to himself: "Motor-cars are perishable things. I did for my first beloved by my excesses. Rather than knock this divinity about I will abstain from motoring." And the cab-proprietor of Midhurst must have made a fortune out of Jimmy's abstinence.

The odd thing was that Charlie Thesiger respected it. (He too had come down for the last fortnight in July.) He was the only one of us who didn't protest, didn't clamour, didn't try to reason or to laugh Jimmy out of his insanity. And he went further. He refused to enter the car, to be taken in it on the few suitable days when Jimmy allowed it to go out. It was as if he were dominated by some scruple as morbid as his host's passion. We couldn't account for it at the time, for he liked motoring excessively, and he couldn't afford it.

I've wondered since whether this wasn't the way Charlie settled with his conscience, his own sacrifice to decency. He could eat Jimmy's bread and drink his wine and stay for weeks under his roof, since his necessity—the necessity of seeing Viola—compelled him, but to profit by him to that extent, to make use of Jimmy's opulence, was beyond

him. His conscience may have even said to him, "If he loves his motor-car, for God's sake let him have *that,* at any rate, to himself."

And Viola seemed to share Charlie's scruple. She, too, shrank from using the new car. And I remember her saying to me one day as we crossed the courtyard and saw Jimmy, as usual, in the garage, worshipping his car, "I'm so glad he's got it. I think it makes him happier." As if she had confessed that it was all he *had* got; that she was not able to make him happy any more; and as if, in some day of unhappiness that she saw coming, it would be a consolation to the poor chap. At any rate, as if she were not in the least jealous of the power it had over him.

So, that July, Norah and I drove with Jimmy when the car, so to speak, let him drive it; and Viola walked through the woods and over the downs with Charlie Thesiger.

We often wondered what they found to talk about.

That wonder, of what Viola could see in Charlie, and how she could endure for so many hours the burden of his society, was all that Norah had allowed herself, so far, to express. If she felt any uneasiness she had not yet confided it to me. As for Jevons, he tolerated him as you only tolerate a thing that doesn't matter. I think honestly that to both of them, Charlie, in any serious connection with Viola, was as impossible as Jevons himself had been to her brother Reggie.

So little did he take him seriously that at the very end of July he went up to London for the inside of the week (he went by train so as to save the car) while Charlie was still at the Old Grange.

It was the week of the international crisis, and European mobilization was occupying Jimmy's mind to the exclusion of other matters. Still, you could hardly sup-

pose that it was the crisis that was taking him up to London. I remember thinking he had run away from Charlie Thesiger, because he bored him.

He left on Tuesday, the twenty-eighth, and he was to be back on Friday, the thirty-first, and Charlie was to leave with Norah and me and our nurse and Baby on the Monday following, when our fortnight was up.

So on Friday afternoon I was a little astonished to find my sister-in-law, dressed in her town suit of white cloth, drinking tea at three o'clock before going up to London. She simply stated the fact that she was going up. Norah had said she might stay in our house and she hoped I wouldn't mind.

When I suggested that it would surely be nicer for us all to go up together on Monday she looked at me with a certain long-suffering expression that she had for me at times, and said that wouldn't suit her, since she had got to go to-day. She was of course awfully sorry to leave us, but Norah understood, and Jimmy would look after us very well.

No. She wasn't going up by Midhurst. She was going by Selham.

She rose. I noticed the impatient energy of her little hands as they knotted her veil under her chin. I looked up her trains and found that there was none from Selham till four forty-five. I pointed out to her that there was no hurry; she had missed the two fifty-five, which had left Selham fifteen minutes ago, and she had an hour to spare even if the car took half an hour getting to the station. (The day was fine and there was no dust. Even Jimmy couldn't have objected to her taking the car.)

But she said she hadn't missed the two fifty-five; she wasn't trying for it; and she wasn't going in the car; it would be wanted to meet Jimmy at Midhurst Station;

and no—no—*no*—she didn't want a cab from Midhurst. She was going to walk.

I said it was absurd for her to walk four miles on a hot day like this, and she replied that the day would be cool enough if only I'd keep quiet. (She was still long-suffering.)

Then of course I said I'd walk with her.

But that was too much for her, and she stamped her foot and said I'd do nothing of the kind. She didn't want anybody to walk with her.

And when I inquired about her luggage—— But I can't repeat what she said about her luggage!

Then she softened suddenly, as her way was, and kissed Norah, and said I was a dear, and she was sorry for snapping my head off, but it was all right. Norah knew all about it. She'd explain.

I can see her standing in the postern doorway and saying these things and then giving me her hand and holding mine tight, while she shook her head at me and smiled that little baffling smile that seemed to come up flickering from her depths of wisdom on purpose to put me in the wrong.

"The trouble with you, Furny," she said, "is that you're much too good."

She went; and we saw her tall, lithe figure swinging up the lane, past the courtyard and the paddock and the moor.

Then Norah plucked me in by the coat-sleeve as if she thought we oughtn't to be looking at her. We shut the door on her flight and turned to each other where we stood on the flagged path before the house.

"What does it mean?" I said.

"It means that she's at the end of her tether."

"The end——?" I think I must have gasped.

"The very end. She can't stand it any longer."

"But," I said, "she—she's got to stand it. After all——"

"There's no good talking that way. She *can't,* and that settles it. I knew she couldn't, once she got beyond a certain point."

"Do you mean to say," I said, "that she's going to leave him?"

"I—don't—know. I believe—she's going to think about it."

"But—it's out of the question. She mustn't think about it."

"You can't stop her thinking, Wally. She's gone away to think about it sanely. It's the best thing she can do."

"And you're helping her to get away?"

She was silent for a moment.

"I'm only helping her to think," she said.

I was stern with her. "You're not. You're just helping her to bolt," I said. "You're conniving at her bolting. You've lent her our house."

"Isn't it better she should come to us?"

"No, it isn't better. I don't like it. And I won't have it. I won't have you mixed up in it. Do you understand?"

"Dear Wally—there isn't anything to be mixed up in. We'll be back on Monday; then she'll only be staying with us."

"And till then——?"

"Till then—for Heaven's sake let the poor thing have peace for three days to think in."

"That's all very well," I said, "but what are we to say to Jimmy when he comes back this afternoon?"

"You say—you say she's tired of—of Amershott and wants three days in London to herself.—No, you don't.

You don't say anything. You leave it to me. Vee-Vee said it was to be left to me."

"And *I* say I won't have you dragged into it. Good Heavens, have you any idea what you may be let in for, supposing——?"

"Supposing what?"

I couldn't say what. But I don't think I really had supposed anything—then.

"You needn't suppose things," she said. "Vee-Vee would never let us in. Look here, Wally—you've got to trust me this time. I'm going to see Vee-Vee through, and I'm going to see Jimmy through; but I can't do it if you don't trust me. I can't do it if you interfere."

I said I did trust her, and that God knew I didn't want to interfere, but was she quite sure she was doing a wise thing?

She said, "Quite sure. Let's go and lie down in the pine-wood till tea-time. I wonder if Jimmy would mind us going into Midhurst with the car. We shouldn't hurt it, sitting in it."

We lay out in the pine-wood till we heard the bell for tea, which we had ordered a little before four, in case Jevons should wire for the car to meet him by the early afternoon train that got to Midhurst at four-sixteen.

The table was set as usual in the garden on the lawn in front of the house.

By four o'clock no wire had come from Jevons; so we knew we needn't expect him till a later train. He nearly always came by Waterloo and Petersfield and was met at Midhurst, which gave him his public. But he might come, as Viola had gone, by Victoria and Horsham and be met at Selham.

I remember saying, in a startling manner as the idea struck me, "Supposing he comes by Victoria?"

And Norah said, "What if he does?"

And I, "They might meet at Horsham."

"Why shouldn't they?" she said. "You don't suppose he'll eat her for running up to town?"

"He might," I said, "think it odd of her."

"Not he. The beauty of Jimmy is that odd things don't seem odd to him. Do you know where Charlie is?"

I didn't. We had finished tea before either of us had thought of him. We shouted to him through the open windows of the house, for Charlie had a habit of mooning about indoors till Viola was ready to walk with him.

No answer came to our summons, but it brought Parker, the butler, out on to the lawn. He had a slightly surprised and slightly embarrassed look on his respectable and respectful face, no longer demoralized by Jimmy.

"Were you looking for the Captain, sir?" he said.

I said we were.

Something grave and a little sorrowful came into Parker's embarrassed look.

"Didn't you know he'd gone, sir?"

I said I didn't even know he was going; and then I saw Norah looking at me.

Parker was trying not to look at Norah. He began gathering up the tea-things as if to justify his presence and explain it.

"When did he go?" I said as casually as I could.

"Well, sir—the cab was ordered to catch the four thirty-five from Midhurst."

Now the four thirty-five from Midhurst is the four forty-five from Selham, the train that Viola had gone by. We knew this; and Parker knew that we knew it. That was why, instead of stating outright that Captain Thesiger had gone by that train, he tried to soften the blow to us by saying that the cab had been ordered to catch it, and

leaving it open to us to suppose that perhaps, after all, it might have missed it.

"Did he say when he was coming back?" I asked, again casually.

"He isn't coming back, sir," said Parker. "He's took his luggage with him and all."

"Of course," said Norah. "He's gone to see what they're doing at the War Office. He said he would."

But I knew and she knew and Parker knew he hadn't—or, if he had, it was only one of the things he had gone for. Because, if the War Office had been all that he had in his mind he would have told us, and Viola would have told us, and they would have gone openly together, instead of dodging about like two clumsy criminals, one at Midhurst and the other at Selham.

When Parker had left (he did it very quickly) Norah got on her feet.

She said, "Go and find Kendal and tell him to bring the car around at once."

I asked her what she was going to do?

"Do?" she flashed at me. She had changed all in a moment into a woman whom I did not know.

"I'm going to fetch her back," she said. She had wriggled into her coat. "We'll overtake her before she gets to Selham, if you're quick."

I looked at my watch. It was barely half-past four. Yes, if we were quick, if we started at once, if we let the new car rip we should overtake her on the road, or at the station before she could get into that train with Charlie Thesiger in it. I meant, and Norah's eyes meant, that we would stop her going with him, if we had to drag her from the platform.

We ran to the garage to find Kendal. The new car, the superb black and white creature, stood in the middle

of the courtyard, ready to start when Jimmy's wire came. So far it was all right.

But we had reckoned without Kendal, the chauffeur.

Kendal, absolved from the four-sixteen train at Midhurst, was at his tea in the servants' hall, and at my summons he came out slowly, munching as he came. He was visibly outraged at our intrusion on his sacred leisure. And when he was ordered to start at once for Selham, he refused. There was no train from Victoria, he said, between the four-four that Mr. Jevons hadn't come by and the five fifty-two. *If,* Kendal said, he did come by Victoria, and he always came by Waterloo.

What was the sense, said Kendal, with his mouth full, of going to Selham when we hadn't got a wire?

The sense of it, Norah told him, was that we had a message—an important message—for Mrs. Jevons, which she *must* get before she started.

At this Kendal left off munching and looked at my wife. Even in my eagerness I was struck by the singular intelligence of that look. There was nothing covert in it. On the contrary it was a most straightforward and transparent look. Kendal's knowledge—which might have sought cover if you had hunted it—had come out to meet ours on equal terms.

It only lasted for the fraction of a second. Kendal repeated firmly, but this time respectfully, that she was Mr. Jevons's car and he couldn't take her out without Mr. Jevons's orders, for if he did Mr. Jevons would give him the sack.

To which Norah replied that Mr. Jevons would give him the sack if he didn't, or if he made us miss that train by arguing. I told him sternly to look sharp. He looked it and we got off. I had begun to crank up the car myself while I spoke.

But he had wasted three minutes of our valuable fifteen. Though on the open road we speeded up the car to her sixty miles an hour, we had to slow down in the narrow lanes. Once we were held up by a country cart, and once by cows in our track, and Norah was beside herself at each halt.

As we careened into the station yard I thought that my wife would have hurled herself out of the car.

The station-master stood by the booking-office door. He had an ominous air of leisure. And when he saw us coming he looked at his watch.

He told us that we had missed the train by three minutes (the three minutes that Kendal had wasted).

I had jumped out of the car and was telling Kendal that it was all his fault, and that if he'd done what he was told we should have caught the train, when he turned on me as only a chauffeur convicted of folly can turn.

"Stand away from the car, sir," he shouted. He jerked her nose round with the savage energy of a chauffeur in the wrong; he seemed to impart his own fury to the car. She snorted and screamed as he backed her and drove her forward and backed her again.

And again he shouted to me. "You get in, sir, if you don't want to be left be'ind."

As he seemed to be animated chiefly by the fear of Jevons (whom, by the way, he adored), we could only suppose that his idea was to fly back to Amershott in time for Jimmy's wire.

On the high road past the station he took the wrong turn.

I shouted then. "What do you think you're doing, you confounded fool?"

"Ketch the London train at 'Orsham, sir," said Kendal. And he grinned.

"You can't do it," we said.

"I'll 'ave a try," said Kendal.

His honour as a chauffeur was at stake. His blood was up. His knowledge had begun to work in him and he adored his master. He knew what he was trying to do.

We could do it if we kept our heads; if we exceeded the speed limit; if we had luck; if we didn't break down; if neither the county constabulary nor the country traffic held us up.

Kendal declared we could do it easily and allow for accidents. At Horsham Junction you have nearly half an hour to wait between the arrival of the Midhurst and Selham train and the departure of the London express. And the local trains take more than half an hour to get from Selham to Horsham. At a pinch you could speed the car up to the limit of the local train. And, as we had to allow for accidents, we did speed her up whenever we saw a clean track before us.

The run to Selham was nothing to it. It was as if we were racing the train with its three minutes start, as if, positively, we might overtake it at any of the intermediate stations, as if it were in this hope that we dashed up the long white slope to Petworth.

The heat of the day gathered over our heads and smouldered in the east.

And as we ran I realized at last why we were running and what the race was and the hunt, and what our quarry. I remembered that other slower chase that was yet so keen and so agonizing; that hunting down of the same tender flesh and blood, over the Channel and across a foreign country. That was bad enough; but it was not like this. For then I was alone in my hunting of Viola; there was nobody but me, who loved her, to see her run

to earth and caught crouching in her corner. That she would crouch, this time, and hide herself, I had no doubt. This hunt that I shared with her sister and her servant was abominable to me and shameful. And between the shame of that flight of hers and this flight there was no comparison. You don't go looking at belfries with Charlie Thesiger. I could not reconcile that enchanting and enchanted Viola of the garden of Bruges with this dreadful flying figure.

I hated myself; I hated Kendal, the chauffeur, as I sat behind his tight, efficient body that quivered with the fury of the hunt. (To think that *his* blood should be up and against Viola!) I hated the car that seemed more than ever a living thing, that breathed and snorted and vibrated with the same passion, and was endowed with this incredible speed and this superhuman power. With its black nose and white flanks, and its black hood and the black wings of its splash-boards, it was some terrible and sinister and malignant monster of prey hunting down Viola. Its body had been built, its engines had been forged, to hunt down Viola. The infernal thing had been invented to hunt down Viola.

Somewhere between Petworth and Fittleworth Kendal stopped to water his engine. It was then that we noticed how the gathering heat was piled into a bank of cloud over the east. At the back of our necks we could feel a little hot puff of wind that came up from the west.

"Shouldn't wonder if there was a storm," said Kendal. He added, with the ghost of a grin, "If Mr. Jevons sees that cloud, sir, he'll not wire to be met at Midhurst. He'd crawl home on his 'ands and knees first."

He slipped into his seat and we dashed on.

At Fittleworth, within a stone's-throw of the railway and the road, there is a patch of moor where the ground

rises in a hillock. In July and August when the heather's out this hillock is a crimson landmark above the water meadows.

When we came within sight of it Kendal suddenly slowed down, then jammed his brakes hard, and with an awful grinding and snorting the car came to a stand-still.

Kendal stood up. He muttered something about being blowed. Then he turned.

"Got the glasses there, sir?"

I found the glasses, but I didn't give them to Kendal. I stood up too and looked through them.

I couldn't see anything at first.

"There, sir," said Kendal, pointing. "No. You're looking too much to the left. You got to get right o' thet sandy patch—against thet there clump of heather. Now d'you see, sir?"

I did.

Kendal had made out with the naked eye a figure, the figure of a woman, seated on the hillside, a white figure that showed plainly against the red background of the heather.

"It's Mrs. Jevons, sir," he stated.

It was.

I could see her quite distinctly through the field-glasses. She was sitting on the clump of heather to the right of the sandy patch, settled and motionless, in the attitude of one who waited at her ease, with hours before her. And she was alone.

We went on as far as we could towards the moor. Norah and I left the car and struck across the moor by the sandy track that led to the bare patch and the clump of heather.

The seated figure must have been aware of us from the first moment of our approach. You couldn't miss that

black and white car as it charged along the highway, or as it stood now, with its engines still humming, by the roadside. But the figure remained seated in its attitude of waiting. It waited while we crossed the moor; and as we climbed the hillock we became intensely aware of it and of its immobility.

We saw its face fixed on us with an expression of tranquil patience and expectation. I may say that I felt an intolerable embarrassment before this quietness of the hunted thing that we had run to earth; especially as it was on me, and not Norah, that Viola's face was fixed as we came nearer.

Then she smiled at me; there was neither conciliation nor defiance in her smile, but a sort of serene assurance and—yes, it was unmistakable—contempt.

She said, "Whatever do you think you're doing *now*?"

I said we might not know what we were doing, but we knew what we were going to do. We were going to take her back with us in the car.

At that she asked us (but without any sign of perturbation) if we had got Jimmy there?

Norah said No, our idea was to run back to Amershott before Jimmy got there.

"Where were you running to when you saw me sitting up here?" she said.

I said we'd meant to catch her at Selham but we missed the train and were trying to get to Horsham before the London train started.

She was looking at me now with a sort of compassion, the tenderness of her contempt.

"I see," she said. "You *were* clever, weren't you?"

She looked at her watch. "Well, as you *are* here," she said, "I'd let you run me down to Horsham, if you want a run, only I can't very well use Jimmy's car."

I think it was Norah who asked her what on earth she was doing at Fittleworth.

"Can't you see," she said, "that I'm waiting for the next train?"

"Did you walk here from Amershott, or what?" I said.

She said, "Rather not. I was in the train."

Then Norah said, "What happened?"

It had dawned on us both how odd it was that Viola should be here, apparently alone, at Fittleworth. It was also odd how we were all ignoring Charlie. I believe I had a sort of idea that she had got him hidden somewhere in the landscape.

Viola smiled a reminiscent smile. "If you *must* know," she said, "what happened was that Charlie was in that train, too—he came bursting out on to the platform at Selham, awfully pleased with himself, because he'd picked my luggage up at Midhurst and bagged a corner seat for me, and made faces at people to keep them out."

"Did you know he was going up to town?" I said.

"No, of course I didn't. He didn't know it himself. There was no reason why he shouldn't go. And you'd have thought there was no reason why we shouldn't go together. He was all right till we got to Petworth. But after that he lost his head and made such an ass of himself that I had to get out here and make him go on by himself. Silly idiot!"

We were sitting in the heather, one on each side of her, and I saw my wife slip her arm into hers and hug it to her.

"Did *you* know," she said, "that Charlie'd gone?"

We didn't answer. We simply couldn't.

And then Viola said, "Poor little Norah!"

And she told her to run away for ten minutes while she talked to me.

"Why poor little Norah?" I asked when we were alone.

"Because," she said, "you frightened her."

"I? Frightened her?"

"Yes," she said. "You made her think I was going to run away with Charlie. There's no good trying to look as if you didn't. You're quite awful, Furny, in the things you think. You can't help it, I know. You're so good, so shockingly good, and you can't bear other people to be naughty. You thought I'd run away to Belgium with Jimmy and you came rushing after me and fetched me back. You thought I'd run away with Charlie and you came rushing—in your dreadful rectitude, and in Jimmy's motor-car that he won't let anybody look at. You'll have an awful time with Jimmy when you get back. It's going to rain, and there'll be mud on the car, and he'll dance with rage when he sees it. And he won't think it's any excuse if you tell him you thought I was running away with Charlie, and you took the car to fetch me back; he'll say you'd no business to think it and in any case you'd no business to take the car out. And poor Kendal will be sacked.

"That's all you've done," she said, "by your fussy interference."

She went on. "It wouldn't matter what you think about me—but it was beastly of you to go and make Norah think it."

I said I didn't suppose either of us thought anything, except that since she was going up to town with the idea of leaving her husband, it was not desirable that she should go up with Charlie Thesiger.

"Who could possibly have supposed," she said, "that Charlie would be such an ass?"

I said I for one could.

"Oh, you—haven't I told you you're always supposing things?"

"Surely?" I said, "you must have seen—yourself——"

She smiled. "My dear—I couldn't see anything but poor Jimmy."

"And yet," I said, "you could think of leaving him?"

She moaned. "You fool—you fool—that's *why* I'm thinking of it."

She pressed her hands to her eyes as if she shut back the sight of him.

"You aren't thinking of it," I said. "You haven't left him. You've only been for a good long walk to Fittleworth, and we've come to fetch you back in the car."

"Haven't I told you that I can't and won't use Jimmy's car?"

"You can't use it to run away from him in; but you can very well use it to go back to him."

"I'm not going back to him," she said. "Can't you see that I've burnt my boats?"

"You may have burnt the old ones, Viola," I said. "But you can build new."

"You must give me time, Wally. It'll take a long time. And you don't understand me. I *want* to get away from Jimmy. That's why I'm going away now, while he isn't there. That's what I mean by burning my boats. If I go back to him—if I see him—I shall never get away. I shan't have the courage. I shall just crumple up with the first sight of him—with the first word he says——"

"Why not," I said, "crumple up?"

She lifted her head as I had seen her lift it before.

"Because," she said, "I wish to be straight."

I asked her if running away behind Jimmy's back was her idea of straightness? To which she replied that *my* rectitude was excruciating and that I'd twist anything to a moral purpose, but it was twisting all the same. Couldn't I see that *the* awful thing would be to come sneaking back and pretend to Jimmy that she hadn't run away from him?—If that was my idea of straightness she was sorry for me.

I said, "My dear child, you must see that running away by yourself is one thing, and running away with Charlie Thesiger is another. It would be all very well if Charlie hadn't got into that train."

She wanted to know what that mattered when she had got out of the train? I suggested that the people who saw Charlie get in hadn't seen her get out, and that she must look at the thing as it appeared to other people.

"Look," I said, "at the facts. Mrs. Jevons walks to Selham Station for the London train. Captain Thesiger joins her there, presumably by pre-arrangement, leaving by Midhurst station so that they may not be seen going away together. She is, however, seen entering his compartment at Selham. At Fittleworth she is seized with prudence and with panic. She is seen getting out on to the platform. And she is seen two hours later following the Captain up to London by the next train."

She seemed to be considering it.

"How many people," she said, "know that Charlie was in that train? People that matter—I don't mean you and Norah."

"Your butler, your parlourmaid, your housemaid, your cook, your gardener—by this time—and Baby's nurse——"

("And Baby," she interrupted.)

"——The guard of the train, the booking clerks and porters at Midhurst and Selham, and the station-masters at Midhurst and Selham and Petworth (probably) and Fittleworth. Quite a number of important people, to say nothing of Kendal, who is perhaps the most important of them all."

"And who was it who brought Kendal into it?"

I was silent.

"Nobody but you, Furny, or a born fool, would have dreamed of bringing Kendal in."

I said that a little reflection would show her that it was impossible to keep him out. To this she said, "Please go and find Norah. I want her."

I found Norah. I warned her that Viola was going to be extremely difficult. She said it would be all right if I left Viola to her.

As we approached, Viola turned to her sister with an air of outraged and long-suffering dignity.

"Norah," she said. "I do wish you would make Wally see what an ass he's making of himself."

My wife said, in her admirable, judicial way, "How an ass?"

"Well—trying to make me go back and bringing Kendal out here to fetch me. He doesn't seem to see that if I do go back with him it'll be as good as proclaiming to everybody that I ran away with Charlie and was found out by my clever brother-in-law who tracked me down in my husband's motor-car and brought me back in it. Whereas, if I go quietly on to London, as I meant to and as everybody knows I meant to, it'll be all right."

"It won't," I said, "as long as Charlie's there. It will be if you come home with us in the car now, and go up to town with Norah and me on Monday."

"I've told you," she said wearily, "that I can't go

back because I shall never get away if I do. And I *must* —I must—and I will."

"Yes, dear, and you shall," my wife said, as if she were humouring somebody who was mad.

But for a mad woman Viola, I must say, was extraordinarily lucid.

"What excuse did you give to Kendal for following me in this way?"

"We told him we had an important message to give you before you started."

"Important message! That was pretty thin. I'd have thought of something cleverer than that if I'd been you. You *are* a precious pair of conspirators. Can't you see that it's you—with your ridiculous suspicions—that have given me away?"

Norah answered her.

"Oh, Vee-Vee," she said, "we hadn't any suspicions. The message was to tell you that Charlie was in the train. We knew you didn't know it."

To this Viola said coldly, "Walter didn't."

I tried to reassure her, but she waved me away with her hands and implored me to "let her think."

"Well," she said presently, "it isn't as bad as you've tried to make it, even with Kendal thrown in. You came rushing after me to give me a message, and you *have* given me a message, and now you'll go and tell Kendal that it's all right, and thank him nicely for catching me up, and *you* rush home again, and *I* go on quietly to London by the next train."

"Yes, dear," said Norah. "And I'm going up with you while Wally rushes home and follows with Nurse and Baby and the luggage by the morning train."

"That's all very well," said Viola, "but who explains to Jimmy?"

"Oh," said my wife, "Wally does that. You can trust him. Besides you haven't got to explain things to Jimmy."

Well, we settled it that way. It was the only possible solution. The more she thought of it, Viola said, the more she liked it. And she rubbed it into me that it was Norah's solution, and not mine.

Her last words to me as I saw them off at Fittleworth Station were that I needn't worry. It was going to rain. And when poor Jimmy saw his car come in all splashed with rain and covered with mud—"It won't be me," she said, "you'll have to explain about."

And it wasn't.

The storm came down just as we were leaving Fittleworth, and we brought that car back in an awful state. You wouldn't have known it had ever been a black-and-white car. And Jevons (in a mackintosh) was waiting for me in the lane by the courtyard gates. He had caught the early train, but he had seen the storm coming and had walked up from Midhurst, and, as I say, he was waiting for us.

Well—neither Viola nor Norah was with us, and the language that Jimmy poured out over me and Kendal recalled all the freshness and the vigour of his earliest inspirations; it was steeped, you might say, in all the colours of the sunset; it had flashes of tropic splendour; it was such a gorgeous specimen of an art in which Kendal dabbled, as he said modestly, a little himself, that it "fair took the shine out of him." The chauffeur was prostrated with admiration.

"When Mr. Jevons lays himself out to express himself, sir," he said to me as we retreated, "he pulls it off what you may call a bleedin' masterpiece."

I tried to explain about Viola an hour later. But he

wouldn't listen to me. That was all right, he said. He was going to ask us to take her for a month or so anyhow. It was getting a bit stuffy for her down here.

Then he fixed me with "Did Thesiger go up with her?"

There was no good trying to lie to Jevons, so I said that had been Thesiger's idea, but Viola hadn't cared much about having him, for she had got out at Fittleworth and taken Norah on with her.

"I suppose the young ass tried to make love to her. He's fool enough for anything," said Jimmy. But he reverted. "I still can't see why you took the car out. Anybody but an idiot would have known it was going to rain."

BOOK III

HIS BOOK

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HIS BOOK

XII

'At this period, and even now when I go back to it, I am completely puzzled by Jevons. Here was a man who professed to understand his wife, to know what she was feeling and thinking in every moment of her existence; he would tell you that a man was a fool if he couldn't get the woman he wanted; and yet, having got her, he didn't seem to know in the most elementary way how to keep her. He didn't seem to care. He adored her, and yet he didn't seem to care. I believe he knew that she was leaving him, that she had left him; and yet, here he was, treating her departure as if it didn't matter, as if it were the most natural and reasonable thing in the world, and lashing himself into a fury about his wretched motor-car. And he was treating the dangerous element in the case, Charlie Thesiger, as if it didn't matter either; as if it didn't exist. He must have known we'd taken his car out to bring his wife back—he knew we wouldn't have touched the beastly thing for anything short of saving her life or his honour; and yet he had flown into a passion and sworn at his chauffeur because we'd taken it. He adored his wife and yet he behaved as if she were of no importance compared with the god he'd made of his motor-car.

All that evening, I remember, he was absorbed in the solitary problem of how he could save his god from further outrages. He settled it towards midnight by saying that he'd buy another car that we could do what we damn-

pleased with—a car that wouldn't matter—that you could take out in all weathers.

"I'll not have that black-and-white car used as it was used this afternoon," he said. And after lashing himself up again he ended quite sweetly by saying, "It's my fault, Furny. I ought to have had two cars all along."

I said it *would* be a good plan, if a black-and-white car was only to be looked at.

He admitted (with a recrudescence of his old childlike innocence) that he liked looking at it. I've no doubt he said it made him feel something, but I forget what.

But when the morning came he wouldn't hear of my going. I was to stay out my fortnight. It was a fine day and the dust was laid; perhaps he could take me for a spin across the Downs to the coast or somewhere. He'd send Parker up to town to look after Nurse and Baby and the luggage. He didn't want, he said, to be left alone.

Oh yes, it was plain to me that he didn't want to be left —that he couldn't bear it. He was trying to lure me to stay with him by holding out this prospect of a spin. I have since believed that he would have agreed to take his car out in almost any weather, if that had been the only way to keep me. He clung to me desperately, pathetically, as he had clung nine years ago at Bruges when Viola had left him there. He might, possibly, this time, have clung to anybody; he was so afraid of being left alone. I think he felt that loneliness here, in the vast, unfamiliar landscape that he had invaded, would be as bad as loneliness in Bruges. He would be abandoned, as he had been then, in a foreign country.

So till Sunday morning I stayed with him.

It was on my last evening, the evening of Saturday, August the first, that he spoke of Viola.

He asked me if I thought that Norah and I could keep

her with us, if necessary, for—he hesitated—for six months? (It was as if he had given her six months.) It would, he said, be better.

I said that Norah would be delighted to keep her for any number of months. But did he think she'd stay?

He said why shouldn't she stay? Of course she'd stay. She was awfully fond of us and it was the best thing she could do. And it would make it so much easier for him. He'd feel more comfortable as long as he knew she was with us.

He spoke as if it were he and not Viola who was leaving.

I said then that though we were glad to have her we couldn't, of course, accept any responsibility——

He smiled slightly and asked, "For what?"

I said, "Well——" And he answered his own question in the pause I made.

"I suppose you mean for anything she may take it into her head to do?"

I put it to him that Viola's movements were not always exactly calculable. She might take it into her head to do anything. I really couldn't answer for her.

"*You* can't," he said. "But *I* can. She may go off and look at a belfry or two." (I should have said that "looking at the belfry" was a phrase the family had adopted for any queer thing that any of us might do.) "If there's a belfry anywhere to be seen you may depend upon it she'd want to look at it."

"Whether," I said, "it's in a dangerous place or not?"

"Whether it's in a dangerous place or not. But I'll trust you to keep her out of dangerous places. That's rather what I wanted to talk to you about."

I protested. "There's no good talking about it. I've told you that's just precisely the responsibility I won't

take. And I won't let Norah take it. If you think there's going to be any danger you must look after your own wife yourself."

"My dear fellow, how can I look after her if I'm not here?"

"You're as much here as I am," I said. "More so. And she's your wife, not mine."

I can say now—there's no reason why I shouldn't; it would only amuse Jimmy if he were to see it written—I can say now that for one awful moment I suspected Jimmy of meditating an infidelity. Perhaps he was; but not as we count infidelity.

He ignored what I took to be the essence of the thing.

"We don't know," he said, "where any of us are going to be for the next four months—or the next four years. I know that *I* jolly well shan't be here. What I want to propose is this: that you'll look after Viola and let her have your house when she wants to be in town; and that you have this house for yourself and Norah and Baby when you want to be in the country—just as if it was your own. There'll be that other motor-car you can have—as if it was your own. You can run up to town in it. And you'll probably find that the country will be the best place for you. It'll be much the best place for *them,* and the safest—if you aren't here."

I couldn't see it even then. I said, "My dear chap, why shouldn't I be here? I certainly mean to be here."

And he considered it and said, "I don't see why not. It's different for you. You've got a child and I haven't."

I said I couldn't see what Baby had to do with it.

And he replied that a young child was an infernal complication, and that he was jolly glad he hadn't got one. What Baby had to do with it was to keep me out of it.

Then I asked him what on earth he was talking about.

He said, *"I'm* talking about the European conflagration. What are you?"

He had been talking about it all the time, he had been thinking of nothing but the European conflagration for the last four days. It was the thing, he said, that he had prophesied nine years ago—didn't I remember? (Oh yes, I remembered; but then, he was always prophesying something.) Well then, here it was. And it had come, by God, at the very date he had given it.

I can see him sitting there in his study at Amershott Old Grange. He was deadly quiet. Not a gesture came to disturb my sense of his tranquil triumph in the fulfilment of his prophecy. To say that he enjoyed the European conflagration because it had proved him so abundantly right would give a false impression of an extraordinary and complicated state of mind. There *was* a sort of exaltation about him (his face positively shone, as if the European conflagration illuminated it from afar); but it was a holy and a sacred exaltation, pure from egoism, except that he saw himself—there's no doubt that already he did see himself—figuring.

I remember saying, as lots of people were saying then, that I didn't suppose for a moment we should be dragged into it.

"Dragged?" he said. "Dragged? We shall be in it without dragging—in the very thick."

From the instant the Germans broke into Luxembourg —and he gave them twenty-four hours—we should be in it. We couldn't keep out with a rag of honour to our names. France, he declared, would be in to-day. He gave us, I *think*—but I do not like to say positively that he gave us—three days; he couldn't have been as dead right as all that.

What struck me then as so extravagantly odd was, not

that he had foreseen the war, and England's part in it, but that he should have seen himself there, in the thick—blazing away in the very middle of the conflagration. What on earth Jimmy conceived that *he* should have to do with it I couldn't think. And all of a sudden I had a reminiscence of Jevons as I had seen him nine years ago, talking to Reggie Thesiger in Viola's rooms at Hampstead, prophesying war, and lamenting that he wouldn't be in it because he was an arrant coward.

And as I looked at him again I saw that what made his face shine like that was the sweat that had broken out on it.

Then he made a remark about Charlie Thesiger. Thesiger, he said, knew all about it. He had gone up—he supposed I knew that?—to offer his services to the War Office in the event of England's coming in.

That Charlie had used the opportunity of going to make love to Jimmy's wife didn't seem to bother Jimmy in the least.

Sunday, I remember, was a fine day, with all the dust laid, and Jimmy made himself lovable by running me up to London in his sacred car. He still clung—I could see that he clung—to the superstition of its sanctity.

He left me at my door in Edwardes Square, which he refused to enter. I think he was afraid of seeing Viola. I thought at the time that this was because he was aware of her attitude; that he knew she was at the end of her tether, and that he wanted to be righteously fair, to give her time to think about leaving him, if she wanted to leave him; that he was behaving now as he had behaved at Bruges when he stood back and let me have my innings, and gave her her chance to free herself. And yet I was puzzled. Even he could hardly stand back to give Thesiger

an innings. He *may* have had an inkling. There may have been something of his queer, scrupulous tenderness in this avoidance of her; there may have been his reckless propensity to take the risk; but I am convinced that even then his main object was—like Viola—to burn his boats. He was afraid that if he were to see Viola again he wouldn't be able to go through with it. He may even have been glad that she had left him, because it had made his way easier.

And so, when he had landed me at my door, he turned the black nose of his car round and ran out of Edwardes Square faster than he had run in; as if he were afraid that the place would catch and keep him.

He didn't go back to Amershott. He stayed in London in one of his clubs (he had several now, besides the club in Dover Street), and I saw him sometimes. I didn't say anything to Viola about him. I didn't tell her he was in town. It was as if there had been some tacit understanding among the three of us; there must have been some tacit agreement between him and me.

Sunday passed, and Monday somehow; and on Tuesday, the fourth, we were all holding our breaths under the tension of the Ultimatum.

I have no doubt that in those three days I had some opinion of my own about the European conflagration, that I must have stared with my own eyes sometimes at the fate of Europe and the fate of England, that I must have felt *some* horror and anxiety and excitement that was my own. But as I look back on it all I am aware chiefly of Jevons, of *his* opinions, *his* vision, *his* horror and excitement. I seem to have spent the greater part of those three days with Jevons, and there are moments, in looking back, when he fills the scene. He is the largest and most prominent figure in the crowd that walked the

streets with me on the evening of the Ultimatum, that waited with me outside Buckingham Palace, when London let itself loose in madness; he seems the only sane figure in that crowd or in the processions that moved for hours on end up and down Parliament Street, between Trafalgar Square and Palace Yard. It is as if I had stood alone with Jevons before the Mansion House at midnight when the Ultimatum was declared.

And when I say that it was his horror and anxiety and excitement—and his defiance and exaltation, if you like—that I felt, I do not mean that Jevons talked about it. He was, for those three days, mostly silent. It is that I saw him consumed and burned up by the fever of patriotism and war, and that beside his passion any emotion I may have felt hardly counted.

And every minute we expected to hear him say that he *liked* the War because it made him feel manly. Norah and I pretended to each other that he would say it—it was our idea of a joke, God forgive us.

It was on Wednesday, the fifth, very early in the morning, that he began trying to enlist. It was the first thing he did; and we thought *that* funny.

We thought it so funny that even if he hadn't told us not to tell Viola we wouldn't have told her; we felt that it wouldn't have been quite fair to either of them.

And none of the Thesigers, or anybody connected with the Thesigers, could take Jimmy seriously for one moment. With General Thesiger waiting to be sent to the Front, and Reggie Thesiger preparing to go, and Charlie Thesiger who might be called on any day, with Bertie and all his male cousins enlisting and pulling all the ropes they could lay their hands on to get their commissions, they hadn't time for Jimmy and his importunity. He *was* importunate; and I'm afraid that in those weeks Jimmy

didn't exist for them or any of us, except as a jest that lightened our labours now and then. They were so busy getting their kits that they couldn't even think of the fate of Europe.

And Viola—what she was thinking and feeling God (or Jevons) only knew. She didn't tell us. But I was pretty sure that with Reggie starting for the front in two weeks it wasn't Jevons she was thinking of. I suspected that she wasn't far from feeling that secret hatred of Jimmy that had come to her once or twice before, when she had thought of Reggie. Remember that all this time, even after that illness of hers last year, when she and Reggie met they met as well-bred strangers. She had never lowered her flag or made one sign. She had just suffered in secret with the thought of Reggie biting deeper and deeper into her mind, till, wherever the memory of Reggie was there was a wound. And she had been ill of her wounds and had nearly died of them.

And in those two weeks she had begun to look as if she were going to be ill again. It was bad enough for Norah and for all of them, but conceive what it must have been for her!

And so we came to Reggie's last day and the night when he came to us to say good-bye.

I think she must have written to him or made some sign. But I'm not sure. I only know that he was prepared for her; and that when she came into the room at the last minute, as he turned from Norah's arms, he closed on her, and that they held each other an instant—tight, like lovers—and that neither of them said a word.

After that the War must have seemed to her, as it seemed to all of us, to have wiped Jimmy out.

Just at first we thought that this was the secret of Jim-

my's agony, of his rushings round and round, and of his ceaseless manœuvring. He knew that the War was going to wipe him out; he knew that the world had no use for his sort, the men who only wrote things. There was an end of his writing, of his novels and his short stories and his plays, and if he didn't look out and do something there would be an end of *him*. And he couldn't bear it. He couldn't bear to be reduced to inactivity and insignificance—to be wiped out. He wasn't going to be made an end of if he could help it. These were the things we said about him. What we saw, or thought we saw, was the revolt of his egoism. It didn't look quite sane.

He was furious when he found out that, even if he enlisted, he couldn't buy a commission. He didn't seem to realize that there *were* things he couldn't buy. He was still more furious when he found that the Thesigers wouldn't help him. They *could* help him, he declared, if they liked. Commissions were being given every day to the wrong people, by influence.

Up till now, with his talk about commissions, he had been purely funny, and we had laughed at him. But when he found that he couldn't enlist, that they wouldn't have him, that he wasn't strong enough—they'd discovered a leaky valve in his heart or something—and that in any case he was too old, when he broke down as he tried to tell me this, he wasn't funny at all. He'd been to every recruiting station in London and his own county, and they all said the same thing. He was too old.

This, he said, was where his beastly celebrity had gone back on him. He could very easily have lied about his age (he didn't look it), in fact, he *had* lied about it freely, to every one of them; but his age was recorded against him in the Year-Books of his craft. And he couldn't lie about his heart, he didn't know it had a valve that leaked.

He didn't believe it. He had given the man who examined it the lie; and he had gone to a heart-specialist to get the report (which he regarded as a libel) contradicted, and the heart-specialist had confirmed it, and told him he wasn't the first man who had come to him to get an opinion overruled. He said he was to keep quiet and avoid excitement. He mustn't dream of going to the front. I think the specialist must have been sorry for Jevons, for he went on to tell him that there were other ways in which he could serve his country. He seems to have talked a lot of rot about the pen being mightier than the sword, and to have advised Jimmy to "use his wonderful pen." And at that Jimmy seems to have broken from him in a passion.

And here he was, in a passion still, ramping up and down that private room he had at his club, and saying, "Damn my powerful pen, Furny! Damn my powerful pen!" The whole system, he said, was rotten. He'd a good mind to expose it. He'd expose it in the papers. *That* was the use he'd make of his powerful pen. See how they'd like *that.*

I remember it because it was then that I laid before him my own problem. The *Daily Post* had asked me if I'd go out as its War-Correspondent. I was to wire "Yes" or "No" in the next half-hour, and if I went I should have to start to-night.

I said I didn't know what to do about it.

He stared. "You don't know what to *do?*"

I said: No. It wasn't so simple when you had a wife and child dependent on you. I didn't know whether I ought to take the risk.

And then he said his memorable thing: "If you can take the risk of living—My God," he said, "if I only had your luck!"

His luck, I told him, was a dead certainty. There wasn't a paper that would refuse Tasker Jevons as War-Correspondent. He'd only got to volunteer. Why on earth, I asked him, didn't he?

He became very grave. He seemed to be considering it.

"No," he said, "no. That isn't quite good enough for me. I don't want to go out to the war to write about it. I want to do things.

"Perhaps—if there's no other way—I may be driven to it."

For a moment, then, I suspected him. I doubted his sincerity. He was making all this fuss about enlisting to cover up his cowardice. He must have known all the time they wouldn't take him. He was safe. But put before him a thing he could do—do better than anybody else—a thing that would take him into the thick and keep him there, if he wasn't killed, and he said, No, thank you. That wasn't quite good enough for him.

I didn't believe in his "Perhaps—if there was no other way—he might be driven to it." I saw him driven to do anything he didn't mean to do!

Meanwhile he drove *me*. Before I had seen him I hadn't really meant to take that job. He did something to me that changed my mind.

That was how I went out to Belgium as a War-Correspondent.

I was out for a month. Then—I was in Ghent at the same old hotel in the Place d'Armes—I got a touch of malaria and had to come home, and the *Daily Post* sent another man out instead of me.

That was how I managed to see Jevons in what Norah called his second war-phase. He had been trying hard to get out with the Red Cross volunteers, and it had been

even funnier, she said, and more pathetic, than his enlisting. I don't know what Viola thought of his war-phases; to Norah they were just that—funny and pathetic. To the other Thesigers he was purely offensive. They resented Jevons's trying to have anything to do with the war, as if it had been some sort of impertinent interference with their prerogative. His mother-in-law, I know, had no patience with him. His frantic efforts to get to the front were nothing, she declared, but a form of war-panic. It took some people like that. She said the only really cruel thing I had ever heard her say of him. She said he *looked* panic-stricken. (He was lean and haggard by this time, and had a haunted look which may have been what she meant.) And well—if it wasn't panic that was the matter with him it was self-advertisement, and if I'd any regard for him or any influence with him I'd stop it. The little man was simply making himself ridiculous.

I was staying in Canterbury with Norah for the week-end, and I heard all about it. He did seem to have been rather funny. He had begun with a scheme for taking out a Red Cross Motor Field Ambulance which he proposed to command in person. He had offered himself with his convoy first to the War Office, then to the Admiralty, then to the War Office again, and the War Office and the Admiralty kicked him out. Then he had gone round to each of the Red Cross Societies in turn, the American included. And they had all got their own schemes for Motor Field Ambulances, and didn't want his. What they *did* want was his subscriptions and his powerful pen to support their schemes. And Jevons had said, "Damn my powerful pen!" to every one of them. As for subscriptions, he subscribed enormously to his own Motor Ambulance Corps. He had actually raised his unit, found his volunteers, his surgeons, his chauffeurs and his

stretcher-bearers, he had bought and equipped a Motor Ambulance car, the one he had proposed to go with himself. And they took his subscriptions and his Ambulance Car and his volunteers; but they wouldn't take him; no, not at any price. They put one of his surgeons at the head of the thing instead of him and sent it out without him, and Jimmy had to see it go. But when they proposed that Jimmy should use his powerful pen to maintain it in the field, he swore that he would use it to expose the whole system. And when he found that the responsibility for rejecting his services rested with the War Office, he went down to the War Office and complained, and to the Admiralty and complained, and to the Home Office and complained. After that he seems to have visited all the Embassies in turn—the American, the French, the Belgian, and I suppose the Russian and the Japanese.

When I asked the Thesigers what he was doing now they said they didn't know. They hadn't heard of him and his activities for quite a fortnight, and they didn't bother about him. They were too much wrapped up in Bertie and in Reggie, even if they hadn't been too busy—every one of them up to their necks in work for the Army or the hospitals. They admitted that he had sent them large subscriptions.

It seemed to me, as far as I could make out, that Viola hadn't seen or heard of him since she had left Amershott. She was too busy and too much wrapped in Reggie to bother about him either; at least, it looked like it. She seems to have known in a vague way that he had talked about going to the front, but I didn't believe she thought he would ever get there.

And he had lain low for a fortnight.

When we had got back to London at noon on Tuesday, which was the end of Jimmy's fortnight, I found a wire

from Amershott waiting for me. It had been sent that morning. It said: "Leaving to-morrow. Must see you urgent business. Can you come down this evening. JEVONS."

I knew that he wouldn't send a wire like that without good reason; so I went.

A light rain was falling when I reached Midhurst. A hired dog-cart met me at the station, so I gathered that Jimmy's mad passion for his motor-car had survived the war.

And at Amershott everything seemed to have survived. If it had not been for troops on the high road, and for the stillness of the coverts, and for the recruiting posters stuck everywhere on the barn-doors, and for the strange figure of old Perrott driving the mail-cart from Midhurst to Amershott instead of his son, you wouldn't have known that the war had anything to do with England. And I expected to find Jimmy in his old Norfolk suit standing in the garage and looking with adoration at his motor-car.

As I thought all this I smiled when Parker told me that Mr. Jevons was in the garage. Parker, I noticed, didn't smile.

And in another minute it was Jevons who did all the smiling.

I found him in the garage—no, I can't say I found him, for I didn't recognize him, but I heard his voice assuring me that it was he. He was in khaki; from head to foot, from his peaked military cap to his puttees he was in faultless, well-fitting khaki; even his shirt and his necktie were khaki. Jimmy's colours showed up wonderfully out of all that brownish, greyish, yellowish green. His flush fairly flamed, and his eyes, his eyes looked enormous

and very bright—great chunks of dark sapphire his eyes were. They were twinkling at me.

"It's me all right, old man," he said, and turned from me in his deep preoccupation. And as he turned I saw that he wore round his right arm a white brassard with a red cross on it.

At the far end of the coach-house where the great black and white idol used to stand there was a khaki car with a huge red cross on a white square on its flank and on its khaki canvas hood. This was what his eyes turned to.

"But—where's the black-and-white god?" I asked.

"There she is," he said, "you're looking at her."

"You haven't——"

"Yes, I have. She's had her new coat on for the last three weeks. You couldn't take her out as she was, all black and white. She'd have been knocked to bits before we'd begun our job. So I had her painted. She's a good enough target for shell-fire as she is."

"You don't mean," I said, "that you're going out?"

"What else have I been meaning ever since there was a war?"

"But—where are you going *to?*"

"Belgium," he said. He added that it was the only blessed place he *could* get to.

"And what are you going to do when you get there?"

He said he was going to scout for wounded, of course.

And as he saw me still incredulous he told me how he'd managed it. He had gone every day for three weeks to the Belgian Legation and worried the Belgian Minister into a state of nervous prostration. And when the Minister was at his worst and was obliged to leave things a bit to his secretaries, he'd gone to the secretaries and worried *them* till the First Secretary had given him his passport and a letter of introduction to the President of the Belgian

Red Cross Society at Ghent. And he had gone to Ghent—went there last week—and he had seen the President and talked to him. He had talked for ten minutes before his services had been accepted by the Belgian Red Cross.

And he was going out to-morrow.

"It's just taken me six weeks to do it. I gave myself six weeks."

Of course I congratulated him. But I couldn't realize it. The whole thing seemed incredible. Jevons in his khaki was incredible. The transformed motor-car was incredible, as a thing that Jevons was concerned with. Above all, it was incredible that he should have sacrificed his god.

I couldn't believe it until Kendal, the chauffeur, turned up, also in khaki and with a Red Cross brassard on his right arm. Kendal was credible enough; he looked as if he had been going to the war all his life. It was evident that he was keen on the adventure. It was also evident that he adored Jevons more than ever. By watching Kendal in the act of adoration and keeping my eyes fixed on him I was able to take it in, and to assent to the statement that Jevons was going to the war.

He was of course if Kendal said so.

Kendal was asking me what I thought of the car.

"She's not the beauty she was, sir," said Kendal. "I don't suppose Mr. Jevons will care much how he knocks her about now. And they do say the Belgium roads is fair destruction to cars."

I said they were. I'd motored on them. Kendal looked at me as he might have looked at the survivor of a shattering experience. Then he looked at his car. He seemed to be seeing all the roads in Belgium in a hideous vision.

Then he spoke. "Well, they may be bad roads, but Mr. Jevons isn't going to be done. He'll take out ten cars before 'e turns back. Ten cars, he will."

Yes, yes, I might have known it. Was there ever anything Jevons had made up his mind to do and didn't? Had I ever known him turn back from any adventure that he had set out on? If he said he was going to the war, why couldn't I have known that he would go? The more incredible the thing was, the more likely he was to do it.

When I said so he shook his head and said it wasn't really as likely as it looked.

We were sitting together after dinner in his garden. Though it was the third week in September the nights were still warm. Without Viola, the stillness of the place was strange to me, almost uncanny, as if Viola were dead and had come back and was listening to us somewhere. I had just told him it was splendid of him going out like this, and he had smiled back at me and asked, "Like what?" And then I had said I might have known it; it was the sort of thing he would do.

No, he went on, it wasn't likely. It had been touch and go, he had only just pulled it off by the skin of his teeth. It had given him more trouble than anything he'd ever tried for. It had bothered him more. It had bothered him most damnably.

I thought he was referring to his struggles with the recruiting depots and the War Office and the Home Office and the Embassies and all the rest of it. And I said it *was* pretty hard luck his own Ambulance Corps being sent out without him. But he said, No; it wasn't. He hadn't been very keen on the Ambulance Corps. He hadn't really wanted to go out with all that beastly crowd. This quick scouting game—by himself—was more in his line. All he regretted was the time he'd lost.

Well, I said, anyhow he was a lucky beggar to have got what he wanted after six weeks.

At that he looked at me suddenly and his face went all

sharp and thin. Or else I hadn't noticed till then how sharp and thin it was. His flush had seemed to flood it and fill it out somehow, and his eyes struck your attention like two great flashes of energy. The flash had gone out now as he looked at me.

I reminded him: "Haven't you always said you could get what you wanted?"

"Oh yes, I've *said* it, and I've done it. That's nothing. Any fool can do that. The great thing is to make yourself get what you don't want. I didn't *want* to do this. I had to."

"No. You wanted to enlist. But I'm not sure that from your point of view this isn't better."

"Jolly lot you know," he said, "about my point of view."

"Your idea," I explained, "of doing things on your own. Isn't that what you wanted?"

He answered very slowly: "I don't think—it matters—what I wanted—or what I didn't want. It's enough—isn't it?—if I want to *now*—if I want it more than anything else?"

I said, No, I didn't think it did matter.

But I hadn't a notion what he meant. I didn't know that he was on the edge of a confession. I couldn't see that he was trying to tell me something about himself, and that I had started him off by telling him he was splendid. It was as if—then—he too had felt that Viola was there and listening to us, as if he were speaking to her and not to me.

For the next thing he said was, "I want you to tell Viola about it. Tell her it's all right. Tell her I'm all right. See?"

"But shan't you," I said, "be seeing her? Isn't she going to see you off or something?"

He said, "No. Much better not. She wouldn't be con-

tent with seeing me off. She'd try to come out with me. She'd worry me to take her. And I'm not going to take her. She isn't to know I'm going till I've gone. And she isn't to know where I've gone to. I won't have her coming out to me. *You've* got to see to that, Furny. You've got to stop her if she tries to get out. They're *all* trying. You should just see the bitches—tumbling, and wriggling and scrabbling with their claws and crawling on their stomachs to get to the front—tearing each other's eyes out to get there first. And there are fellows that'll take them. They'll even take their wives.

"Not me. Not much. I wouldn't let Viola cross in the same boat with that lot.

"It ought to be put a stop to.

"The place I'm going to—the things I'm going to see—and to do—aren't fit for women—aren't fit for women to come within ten miles of. Whatever you do, Furny—and I don't care what you do—you're not to let her get out."

I suppose—I suppose I made him some sort of promise. He says I did. I don't remember.

I *do* remember telling him I thought it was a pity—if he meant to go out—that he hadn't seen Viola all this time.

And I remember his answer. "I haven't seen her—all this time—*because* I meant to go out. I meant that nothing on this earth should stop me."

"How do you know," I said, "that she'd have stopped you?"

"How do I know? How do I know anything?—It's you who don't know. You don't know anything at all."

Well, he went—like that—without telling any of them.

I ran down on the car with him to Folkestone and saw him off on the boat to Ostend, he and Kendal, his chauffeur—he, as he pointed out to me, superior to Kendal only

in the perfect fitting of his khaki. "Otherwise there isn't a pin to choose between us. Except," he said, "that Kendal doesn't funk it and I do."

And with Kendal grinning from ear to ear over Mr. Jevons's delicious joke, and Jimmy waving his khaki cap in a final valediction, and Kendal's grin dying abruptly as he achieved the military salute he judged appropriate, we parted.

Jimmy's last words to me, thrown over the gunwale, were, "Don't run after me, Furny. You won't catch me *this* time."

XIII

Then I went back and told Viola about it. I took her into my library that had once been Jevons's study, where he had delivered the Grand Attack. I gave her a letter that Jevons had scribbled before lunch in the hotel at Folkestone. I suppose he had explained things in it.

But as for me, or any power I had to break it to her, I might just as well have told her that he was dead.

Except that perhaps then she wouldn't have turned on me.

"You *knew* this," she said, "you knew he was going and you never told me?"

I said I had only known it last night—how could I have told her?

She persisted. "You *knew*—at what time last night?"

I hesitated and she drove it home.

"You might have wired. It wasn't too late."

I said it was, and that I didn't know that she didn't know till it was too late to wire.

"Do you suppose," she said, "—if I'd known—that I should be *here?*"

I couldn't tell her—she was so white under her wound and the shock of it—I couldn't tell her that she had given me no reason to suppose that she would be with him.

And she went on. "Why couldn't you have wired in the morning, then? I could have caught that boat."

"Because, my dear girl, he doesn't want you to go out."

"It doesn't matter what he wants—or thinks he wants —I'm going.

"And what's more," she said, "you've got to take me. That's all you've gained by trying to stop me."

I replied that nothing would induce me to take her out, that I'd promised Jimmy she shouldn't go.

She said that didn't matter. Jimmy'd know I couldn't keep a silly promise like that, and if I wouldn't take her she'd simply go by herself.

I tried to explain to her very gently that her going—at all—was out of the question. She would do no good to anybody by going; she would annoy Jimmy most frightfully; untrained women were not wanted at the front.

Untrained? She had got her certificate three days ago. What did I suppose she had wanted it for—if it wasn't to go out with Jimmy if he went?

"You knew he was going, then?" I said.

"I knew he wanted to go. But I didn't think he'd go so soon. I didn't really think he'd go at all. They told me I needn't worry, that he hadn't a chance."

"Who told you?"

"Oh, everybody. The General and Colonel Braithwaite and Charlie, and Bertie, and Reggie—at least he told Norah—and the people at the War Office and the Admiralty and the Embassies."

"You *went* to them? You went to the War Office?"

"I went everywhere where he did, or as near as I could get. And they all told me the same thing—he hadn't a chance. Not the ghost of a chance. I really thought he hadn't. When you think of the men—men who can do things, who are dying to go and are being kept back——"

"You were helping him to go?" I said. I saw a vision, or I tried to see it, a pathetic vision of Viola following poor Jimmy in his pursuit of secretaries and ambassadors, doing insane, impossible things to help him.

And then I saw Viola herself. She was looking at me, with all her features tilted in that funny way she had.

"Well—no," she said; "I wasn't exactly *helping.*"

"What *were* you doing, then?"

"I'm afraid I was trying to stop him."

The sheer folly of it took my breath away.

"Surely," I said, "if he hadn't the ghost of a chance, it wasn't necessary?"

"Well—it *was* necessary, you see. He's so awfully clever. He was very nearly off once or twice. Only we just managed to get in in time."

"Who got in in time?"

"Oh, it wasn't only me, Furny, it was all of us. We were all out trying to stop him—Charlie and Reggie and Uncle Billy—*he* pulled all the ropes—we couldn't do much."

"But what—what did General Thesiger do?"

"He didn't 'do' anything. He hadn't got to. He just said things. Told them *about* Jimmy."

I don't know whether my face expressed horror or admiration. It must have been a sort of horror, for she began to excuse herself.

"Why not? Why should poor little Jimmy go?"

"Because he wants to. You'd no business to stop him when he wanted to go."

"But—that was it. He didn't want to go. He only thought he *ought* to go."

"How," I said sternly, "do you know what he wanted?"

"Because," she said, "he told Uncle Billy. He kept on saying he ought to go. And we told him he oughtn't. What earthly good can Jimmy do out there, with his poor little heart all dicky? He'll simply die of it. You don't suppose I'd have stopped him if I'd thought it was good for him to go? Or if I'd thought he really wanted to?

We told him all that—Uncle Billy and I did—we told him straight that if he tried to get out we'd try and stop him."

"Oh," I said, "you *told* him. That's a different thing."

"Things, Furny, always are different to what you think them. At least they're never half so nasty. Of course we told him. And of course he laughed in our faces. We thought we *had* stopped him. But—he's slipped through our fingers.

"We might," she said, "have known."

I heard her say all that, though I wasn't listening. It comes back to me that she said it. It was dawning on me that in this queer business there were details, quite important details, that had escaped me. The war had taken up my attention to the exclusion of Viola's affairs. But it was evident that things had happened while I was away. I was thinking of something that she let out.

"Look here," I said, "when you say you told him, do you mean that you and he have been seeing each other?"

"Of course we've been seeing each other. Until he stopped it. He said he couldn't stand the strain."

"And you?" I said. "Did you stand it?"

She looked at me straight and hard.

"You've no right to ask me that," she said.

Well, perhaps I hadn't. And if I had owned frankly that I hadn't all might have been well. But, as it was, before I knew where we both were, we had quarrelled.

Yes. I quarrelled with Viola; or she quarrelled with me; it really doesn't matter how you put it; and it shows the awful tension we must have been living in.

When I heard her say that I had no right to ask her that question I answered that I thought I had.

She said, "What right?"

And I said if she would think a little she would see what right.

And at that she fired up and the blaze was awful. We two were up there alone and she had me at her mercy. She held me in the blaze.

"I suppose," she said, "I'm to think of your everlasting meddling with my affairs?"

I pointed out that a charge of meddling came rather oddly from a lady who honoured me by staying in my house because she preferred it to her husband's.

"You know perfectly well why I'm staying in your house; and if you don't, Norah does. I could have stayed with my father, for that matter."

I said I thought that that was extremely doubtful—in the circumstances.

I had her there, and she knew it, for she retired in bad order on an irrelevant point. She said I was no judge of the circumstances.

I said peaceably that perhaps I wasn't, but that she must own that I had behaved as if I were. At any rate I'd given her the benefit of the doubt.

She said, "You talk as if I'd been through the Divorce Court. Perhaps that's where you think I ought to be. The benefit of the doubt! You certainly *have* given it me. It's been nothing but doubt with you, Walter, ever since I knew you. You always thought awful things about me. I know you have. I could *see* you thinking them. You thought vile things about me, and vile things about Jimmy. You came rushing out to Belgium because you thought them. And the other day you thought the same thing of me and Charlie Thesiger, and you came rushing after me again and giving me away, and behaving so that everybody else would think me awful too."

"My dear child, you owned yourself that Charlie——"

"Oh—Charlie! As if he mattered! He was only being an ass—the war upset him, or something. I don't care what you think about Charlie—he doesn't either—but why you should go out of your way to think *me* awful——"

I said I thought we'd done with that.

"No," she said, "we haven't done with it. I want to get to the bottom of it. What *makes* you do these things? I believe you *want* to make out that I'm horrid, just as you wanted to make out that poor little Jimmy was, when I went to him in Bruges."

She went on. "I can understand *that,* because I did go to him, and I—I cared for him and you didn't like it. I can even understand your wanting *me* to be horrid then, because it made it easier for you. I had the sense to see that that was all that was the matter with you *then,* so I didn't mind. But why on earth you should keep it up like this! What can it matter to you *now* whether I'm nice or horrid?"

She had rushed on, carried away by her own passion, without seeing where she was going. I don't think she had seen, any more than I had, that for nine years I had been living behind a screen. A screen that had hidden me from myself. I don't think she saw even now when she came crashing into it.

It was I who saw.

The thing was down about my ears; and it wasn't the violence of its fall that terrified me; it was my own nakedness. I wasn't prepared to find myself morally undressed.

I turned away from her. I began fiddling with my pens and papers. I trailed long slip-proofs under her eyes, pretending that I had work to do. But she saw through my pretences and her voice followed me.

It was softer, though. It seemed to be pleading, as if she knew nothing about me and my screen.

"What harm did I ever do you? Or poor Jimmy either? I didn't let you marry me. You ought to be grateful to Jimmy. At least he saved you from that."

I said I thought we needn't drag her husband into it, and I haven't a notion what I meant. I had to say something, and if it sounded disagreeable, so much the better.

And she said there I was again—thinking that I had to remind her that Jimmy *was* her husband.

"You certainly seem to have forgotten it," I said.

"*He* knows how much I've forgotten."

With that last word she left me.

I tried hard to shake the horror of it off. I remember I sat down to my proofs, and I suppose I tried to correct them. But all the time I heard Viola's voice saying, "I can understand your wanting me to be horrid *then,* because it made it easier for you. . . . But why on earth you should keep it up like this! What can it matter to you *now* whether I'm nice or horrid?"

It went on in my head till the words ceased to have any meaning. I had only a dreadful sense that I should remember them to-morrow, and that perhaps when to-morrow came I should know what they meant.

And when to-morrow came the war took up my attention again, so that I actually forgot that Viola had said she was going out to it.

She had let the subject drop abruptly. She didn't even refer to it when my friend the editor of the *Morning Standard* rang me up the next day to ask me if I'd go out to Belgium as their Special Correspondent.

He was charmingly frank about it. He told me that it was Tasker Jevons he wanted, and Tasker Jevons he had asked to go, but since he couldn't get him (and his powerful pen) why then, he'd had to fall back on me. Jevons, he

said, had let him down pretty badly; he'd understood from Jevons that he was prepared to go for them at twelve hours' notice. And he'd given him twenty-four hours; and he'd found that he'd gone out there two days ago. Chucked them, my friend the editor supposed, for another paper. Could I, at twenty-three hours' notice, take his place?

I said I could and I would, and I put him right about Jevons.

And then I went to see about my motor-car.

It was when Viola began to bother me about her passport that the fight began.

First of all, she asked me what I was doing about a motor-car? I told her she needn't worry herself about my motor-car. It wasn't any concern of hers. She grinned at that and said, All right. What she really wanted was to consult me about her passport.

And when I refused to be consulted about her passport, to hear a word about her passport or about her going, she walked straight out of the house into a passing taxi that took her to the Belgian Legation, where she saw that weak-minded secretary that Jevons had handled; and she came back in time for tea, very cheerful and dressed in a sort of khaki uniform she had ordered, with a tunic and knee-breeches and puttees and a Red Cross brassard on her right arm.

She said it had been a very tight squeeze, but she'd worked it, down to her uniform, and it was all right, and if I'd had any difficulty with my motor people (I had had awful difficulty, but how she knew it I haven't to this day found out. Sometimes I think she'd worked that too; she knew the firm, and she wasn't Mrs. Tasker Jevons for nothing)—if I'd had any difficulty she could put that straight for me. She'd got *her* car—Jimmy'd ordered it

for Amershott and forgotten about it—and her chauffeur, and I could go in it with her if I liked.

It was a better car than the one I'd had in Belgium before or, she said significantly, than the one I was going to take out with me. It was true that I didn't know anything about cars.

Then Norah, my wife, stood up beside her sister, flagrantly partisan, and said, Couldn't I see it wasn't any use trying to stop her? She had me at every point. If I wouldn't take her she'd go by herself with the chauffeur.

And when I said, How about my promises—my word of honour? Viola laughed.

"Your honour's all right, Wally," she said. "You're not taking me out; I'm taking you."

And very early in the morning we motored down to Folkestone to catch the midday boat for Ostend. And Norah came with us to see us off. If I'd given her the smallest encouragement she'd have come too. I *might* take her, she said; it was beastly being left behind.

I said, like a savage, that Belgium was no place for women. I'd take my sister-in-law there, but not my wife.

I suppose the dressing-down I'd got from Viola two nights before had rankled. I must have felt that I was getting my own back that time, when I threw it up to her that she wasn't my wife.

Norah, I said, had too much sense to want to go where she wasn't wanted.

But Viola only laughed again and said, "Please remember that I'm taking you, not you me. And Norah wants to go as much as I do, and it isn't altogether on your account. You needn't think it. As for keeping her back, you couldn't do it if she meant to go. It's Baby that's keeping her, not you."

And then she thanked God she hadn't got a child.

And so, sparring and chaffing by turns, half in play and half in earnest—for a secret subterranean anger smouldered still in both of us—we got off. I remember at the last moment Norah—dear little Norah—telling her that she was not to bully me. She was to let me sit in the motor-car as much as I liked; and she was to see that I didn't get into any danger.

Danger? Danger? As the great fans of the screws churned the harbour water into foam that the waves thinned and flattened out again till the green lane broadened between our track and the pier head where Norah stood, and the little, slender, dark blue figure became a dot on the pier and lost itself in the crowd of dots and disappeared, then, for the first time, it struck me that to be going off like this, alone, with Viola, was danger in itself.

Because, the other night she had made me see myself as I really was—a man, not of an irreproachable rectitude, an immaculate purity (had I ever, had anybody ever really supposed that I was such a man?) but quite deplorably human, and blind—yes, my dear Viola, blind as any bat—and vulnerable, so vulnerable that I think you might have spared me, you might have had some pity.

I found myself addressing her like that, in my heart, as I walked up and down, up and down the deck, not looking at her, but acutely aware of her, where she sat in her deck-chair, bundled up in her great khaki motor-coat and in the rugs I had wrapped round her.

I resented the power she had over me to make me aware of her—at such a time, or at any time, for that matter. Here was I, a Special Correspondent, going out to the war; and there, on the other side of the Channel, *was* the war; in the fields of France and of Flanders men were fighting, men were slaughtering each other every day by thousands. I was a man and I should have been thinking

of those men; and here I was, compelled against my conscience and my will to think of this woman. She had come out with me against my conscience and my will, and against my judgment and my good taste and my honour and my common sense, against everything in me that I set most store by. I hadn't meant to take her with me, and she had made me take her.

And when my common sense told me that she hadn't; that I wasn't taking her, and that she had as much right to be on the Ostend boat as I had, I still resented her being there. I still raged as I realized the power she had over me. She had always had it. She had had it the first day I ever saw her, when she had walked into my rooms against my orders, half an hour behind the time I had appointed, and had made herself my secretary against my will. She had had it when she used me as a stalking-horse to draw her brother's suspicions away from her and Jevons; she had had it when she drew me after her to Belgium, and when I followed her from Bruges to Canterbury at her bidding; she had had it when I married Norah (hadn't she told me, in the insolence of it, that she had meant that I should marry Norah?). She had had it, this malign power over me, the other night, and she had it now. She always would have it.

It wasn't my fault, I told myself, if she compelled me to look at her, this time, as I passed her deck-chair.

I looked at her, and she sent me a little sad interrogative smile that asked me why I walked the decks thus savagely and alone? And I paid no attention to her or to her smile. In the very arrogance of isolation I continued to walk the decks. I meant her to see that I *could* be alone and savage if I liked.

And when I looked at her again (she couldn't have *made* me this time, for she was unaware of me, lost in some pro-

found meditation of her own), when I looked at her again my anger and my resentment died with a sort of struggle and a pang.

She had, after all, the grace of her ignorance and innocence. If she had had no pity on me, it was because she was as blind as she had said I was. She didn't, she couldn't see me as she had made me see myself. She didn't know that she had any power over me, or else she wouldn't have used her power; she was too honourable for that, too chivalrous. You could trust her to play the game until she threw it up and left it.

And I passed again in my sullen tramping, and I looked at her for the third time, urged by the remorse that stung me. And this time she drew me so that I went over to her and sat by her. I looked at my watch, we had been two hours on board.

I had left her two hours alone; and in those two hours she had suffered. Her face was set now in a sort of brooding fear and anguish; her breathing had a tremor in it, as if her heart dragged at her side. It was better, far better, that we should quarrel than she should suffer and sit quivering in silence and see frightful things.

But I saw that she wasn't going to quarrel, she wasn't going to pitch into me; she wasn't going to assert herself and domineer over me just now. This agony of hers had made her gentle, so that she spoke to me as if she were sorry for me after all.

"Are you tired," she said, "of tramping up and down?"

"Horribly tired."

"Put my rug round you if you're going to sit still. Norah wouldn't let you sit still without a rug."

"Norah wouldn't let me do anything I shouldn't do."

She smiled down at me, still sad, but with the least little flicker of irony on the top of her sadness. "Norah's

job isn't very hard. You don't ever *want* to do anything you shouldn't."

"Oh—don't I?"

"No, never. That's the pull you have over naughty people like me. You're so good."

"It wasn't my goodness you were rubbing into me the other night."

"Never mind the other night. It doesn't matter what I said the other night. Only what I'm saying now this minute has any importance. But it was your goodness, if it comes to that."

"Queer sort of goodness." I was still, you see, a little stung.

"All goodness," she said, "is queer, carried to that pitch. But you're a dear in spite of it. I won't bully you."

We made the last part of the crossing on the highway of the sunset. The propeller lashed through crimson and fiery copper, and the white wake tossed on to the highway turned to rose and gold and its edges to purple.

I had left her again and I called to her to look at this wonder of the sky and sea; but she shook her head at me. There was no need to call her. She had looked. I could see by her eyes that the intolerable beauty had brought Jevons back to her. He was there for her in all beauty and in all wonder.

Then she called to *me*. "Wally, come here. I want to speak to you."

I came.

"You thought I was going to leave Jimmy. But I wasn't. *He* knew I wasn't. Why, the first night I knew how impossible it was."

I said, Yes. Of course it was impossible. And of course he knew.

"I shan't mind if only we can get to him before anything happens."

I said nothing would happen, and of course we should get to him.

She was silent so long that I was startled when she said, "Wally—your nerves aren't *you,* are they?"

I said, No. No. Of course they weren't.

I knew what she was thinking. Out of the intolerable beauty she had seen Jimmy rise with all his gestures. She heard the cracking of his knuckles and saw the jerking of his thumb. And these things became tender and pathetic and dear to her as if he were dead.

And she had seen herself shudder at them as if it had been another woman who shuddered, a strange and pitiless woman whom she hated.

"It wouldn't matter so much if he had wanted to go," she said.

"Why do you keep on saying that he didn't want to go?"

"Because he said so. He said he was only going because he couldn't go."

"I think you're doing him a great injustice. He told *me* he wanted to go; I've no doubt he did want to go—just like any other man."

"Yes. To be just like any other man—*that's* what he wanted. But he couldn't be. He isn't like any other man. And so it's worse for him. Can't you see that it's worse for him? It'll hurt him more."

I said I didn't see it, and that she was absurd and morbid and utterly unreasonable, and that she was making Jimmy out unreasonable and morbid and absurd.

She told me then I didn't understand either of them; and we were silent, as if we had quarrelled again, until we came in sight of the Flemish coast.

We sailed into Ostend on the tail-end of the sunset.

What was left of it was enough to keep up for us the intense moment of transfiguration, so that we didn't miss it. The long white Digue, the towers, the domes of the casinos and hotels, the high, flat fronts of the houses showed soaked in light, quivering with light. Ostend might have been some enchanted Eastern city. It was as if the heroic land faced us with the illusion of enchantment, to cover the desolation that lay beyond her dykes.

And we who looked at it were still silent, not now as if we had quarrelled, but as if this beauty had made peace between us.

Viola's face had changed. It reminded me in the oddest way of her brother Reggie's. I think that for the moment, while it lasted, she had forgotten Jimmy, she had forgotten her brother Reggie; she had touched the fringe of the immensity that had drawn them from her and swallowed them up. And in forgetting them she had forgotten her unhappy self.

In Ostend, at any rate, I was to have no more of her brooding. We had no sooner landed than she became the adorable creature who had run away with Jevons nine years ago and led me that dance through the cities of Flanders. She showed the same whole-hearted devotion to the adventure, the same innocence, the same tact in ignoring my state of mind. She seemed to be making terms with me as she had made them then, suggesting that if *I* would ignore a few things I should find her the most delightful companion in my travels. We must, she seemed to say, of course forget everything that she had said to me the other night or that I had said to her before or since; and, as she swung beside me in her khaki, her freedom and her freshness declared how admirably *she* had forgotten. It wasn't as if we didn't know what we were really out for.

Except that she was a maturer person—thirty-one and not twenty-two—I might have mistaken her for Viola Thesiger, my secretary, setting out, in defiance of all conventions, with little Jevons, to look for Belfries in Belgium, and taking the war, since there *was* a war on, in her stride.

And as I walked with her through the same streets where nine years ago I had hunted for her and Jevons, it struck me as a strange, unsettling thing that I should be taking her out to look for Jevons and at the same time playing precisely Jevons's part in the adventure. She too must have been aware of this oddness—for she stopped suddenly to say to me, "Do you remember when I ran away with Jimmy? Isn't it funny that I should be running away with you?"

I said it was. Very funny indeed. And I wondered why she had drawn my attention to it just now? Did she want to make me judge by the transparent innocence of this running the not quite so transparent innocence of that? I think so. Remember, it was Reggie Thesiger's apparent doubt as to her innocence that had been at the bottom of all the trouble of the last five years. It accounted for her attack on me the other night. It was as if she had turned to say to me triumphantly, "Now, perhaps, when I'm running away with *your* precious perfection, at last you understand?"

We had some difficulty in finding quarters and Viola insisted on our staying in the Station Hotel, which had been bombarded by an aeroplane the night before. She pointed out that it was almost entirely empty. "And so," she said, "there won't be anybody to see us."

It was as if she wished to remind me by how thin a thread *my* reputation hung.

The business of our passports kept us in Ostend the

next morning. I had made up my mind there would be difficulty about Viola's military pass, I was even contemplating the possibility of her being sent back to England by the next boat; but no; she had forestalled obstruction, and the pocket of her khaki coat was stuffed with letters from the War Office, the British Red Cross, and the French and Belgian Embassies. In fact, there was one horrid moment at the depot when it looked as if the Special Correspondent would be smuggled through under Viola's protection.

"You see, Furny," she said, "nobody's going to stop me. Nobody wants to stop me."

At last we got off, and early in the afternoon we were in Bruges.

We had run into the Market-Place before we knew where we were; and yonder in the street at the back of it was Viola's *pension,* and here on our right hand was Jimmy's hotel, and there, towering before us, was the Belfry. We looked at each other. And through the war and across nine years, it all came back to us.

"The Belfry's still there," I said.

"It always was." She said it a little sternly. But she had smiled at the allusion, all the same—the smile that had never been denied to it.

We stayed an hour in Bruges and lunched there in Jimmy's hotel. The fat proprietor and his wife were still there and they remembered us. They remembered Jimmy. And they had seen him three days ago. Mr. Chevons had passed through Bruges in his Red Cross motor-car. They seemed uncertain whether Viola was Mrs. Chevons or Mrs. Furnival, and they addressed her indifferently as either. An awful indifference had come to them. Of the war they said, *"C'est triste, n'est-ce pas?"* We left them, sitting

pallid and depressed behind the barricade of their bureau, gazing after us with the saddest of smiles.

That hour in Bruges was a mistake; so was our lunching at Jimmy's hotel. It was too much for Viola. It brought Jimmy so horribly near to her. I don't know what she was thinking, but I am convinced that from the moment of our entering Bruges the poor child had made up her mind that Jimmy had been killed. The smile she had given to the Belfry was the last flicker of her self-control, and halfway through lunch the grey melancholy that Bruges had absorbed from Jimmy nine years ago came down on her, as nine years ago it had come down on me, and it swallowed her up. By the time the waiter brought the coffee she was done for. Her eyes stared, hard and hot, over the cup she tried to drink from. She couldn't drink because of the spasm in her throat.

"Come," I said, "we must clear out of this."

We cleared out.

I too was invaded by the grey melancholy as we came to the bridge by the eastern gate where I had found Jevons that night leaning over and looking into the Canal. It was the sentry's sudden springing up to challenge us that saved me. I hoped that it would save Viola. She enjoyed the sentries.

But not this time. Her nerves were all on edge and she showed some irritation at the delay. I felt then that I had to take her in hand.

"My dear child," I said (we were running out on the road to Ghent now), "do you realize that there's a war?"

She answered, "Yes, Wally, yes, I know there is."

"Do you know that Antwerp's over there, a little way to the north? And that they've dragged up the big guns from Namur for the siege of Antwerp?"

"Oh, Wally—*have* they?"

She turned her face to the north as if she thought she could see or hear the siege-guns.

"But you *said* Jimmy was in Ghent."

"Jimmy," I said, "is probably in Ghent. If he isn't, he's in Antwerp. Do you know that the battlefields are down there—no—there—to the south, where I'm pointing? There's fighting going on there *now*."

She said, "Yes, dear, I know, I know," very gently; and she put her hand on my knee, as if she recognized the war as my private tragedy and was sorry for me. Then she fell back to her brooding.

Somewhere on the great flagged road between Bruges and Ecloo we met a straggling train of refugees—old men and women and children, bent double under their enormous bundles, making for Bruges and Ostend. They stared, not at us, but at the road in front of them, with a dreadful apathy, as we passed.

"This," I said, "is what finishes *me*—every time I see it."

She said nothing.

"Do you realize," I said, "that those women and those little children are flying for their lives? That they've come, doubled up like that, for miles—from Termonde or Alost? That they've lost everything they ever had?" (I can hear my own voice beating out the horror of it in hard, cruel jerks.) "That their homes—their *homes*—are burned to ashes somewhere down there?"

At my last jerk she turned.

"No," she said. "I'm cold and hard and stupid, and I do *not* realize it. Neither do you. If either of us realized it for two seconds we should be either cutting our throats in that ditch or going back to Ostend now with a load of those women and children, instead of tearing past them like devils in this damned car.

"I can't realize anything till I know whether Jimmy's all right or not. I can't see anything, or feel anything, or think of anything but Jimmy. Bruges is Jimmy and Belgium is Jimmy and the whole war is Jimmy—to me. I don't care if you *are* horrified. I can't help it if I *am* callous. It is so. And you can't make it different."

I remember saying quite abjectly that I was sorry—that I was only trying to turn her mind to other things as a relief.

"I'm to turn my mind to *that*—as a relief!"

She showed me a woman I was trying not to see, a woman who carried the bedding of her household on her back and dragged a four-year-old child by the hand. The child slipped to its knees at every other yard, and at every other yard was pulled up whimpering and dragged again—not with anger or any emotion whatever, but with a sickening repetition, as if its mother's arm was a mechanism set going to pull and drag.

If ever there was a weathercock it was my sister-in-law. Without even pretending to consult me, she made Colville, the chauffeur, turn the car round. (He was *her* chauffeur, after all, she said.)

"I don't know," she said, "whether I realize that woman or not, or whether you do. But I'm going to take her into Bruges."

And we took her. (Viola nursed the four-year-old child all the way.) We also took an old man and a young woman with a baby at her breast, and two small children. It was the only thing to be done, Viola said.

It was nearly half-past five when we left Bruges the second time.

"God only knows," I groaned, "what time we'll get to Ghent!"

"He does," she said. "He knows perfectly well we shall get there by half-past seven."

And we did.

It was dark when we turned into the Place d'Armes and drew up before the long, grey Hôtel de la Poste. I jumped out and stood by the kerb to give Viola my hand.

"But—" she said, "I *know* this place."

"You ought to."

I don't know where she expected us to go. She still sat in the car as if held there by the shock of recognition. She ignored my outstretched hand.

"You'd better take your things," she said at last, "if you want to get out here. I'm going on to look for Jimmy."

I had then my first full sense of what I was in for. I saw that she was perfectly prepared to throw me over, to dump me down here or anywhere else and go on by herself with the car and the chauffeur that were, or ought to have been, mine.

She didn't care if I *was* Special Correspondent to the *Morning Standard,* and she had that beastly chauffeur in her pocket all the time. (I discovered afterwards that she'd laid in food for him and hidden it in the locker under the front seat, so that they might be ready for any sort of adventure.) And yet in the very moment that I realized her disastrous obstinacy I found her intolerably pathetic.

"If you want to look for Jimmy," I said, "you'd better get out too. He'll be here if he's anywhere in Ghent."

But she was already on the kerb, brushing me aside. She had seen behind my back the approach of the concierge and she made for him.

"Is Mr. Jevons in this hotel—Mr. Tasker Jevons?"

Yes, Mr. Chevons was in the hotel. Madame would find him in the lounge.

She had swept past him to the stair of the lounge, and I was following her discreetly when the proprietor dashed out of his bureau to intercept us. The lounge, he said, was reserved from seven till nine o'clock for the officers of the General Staff.

Viola had paid no attention to the proprietor and was sweeping up the stair. I gave Jevons's name and explained that the lady was Mrs. Jevons.

The proprietor, a portly and pompous Belgian, positively dissolved in smiles and bows and apologetic gestures. *Mille pardons, monsieur, mille pardons.* It would be *all* right. Monsieur Chevons was dining with the officers of the General Staff.

He did not know that Madame was expected. He was to reserve a room for Monsieur?

I told him to reserve rooms for me and the chauffeur, and to consult Mr. Jevons about Madame. And I hurried up the stair after Viola.

She was waiting for me at the turn, on the landing, by the wide archway of the lounge, where the great glass screen began that shut off the staircase. She stood back from the entrance, looking in, and smiling at what she saw. It was clear by her attitude and her absorption that something was happening in there.

As I approached she made a sign to me and withdrew farther back and up the stair.

"He's there," she whispered. "Over there. In that corner."

For a moment we stood together on the stair, looking down through the glass screen into the lounge.

The far end of the lounge had been turned into a dining-place for the officers of the Belgian General Staff. Most

of the tables were cleared now and deserted. But from our place on the stair we had a clear view slantwise of one small table in the corner. And we saw Jimmy seated at that table.

At least we made him out.

All but Jimmy's head was hidden by the figures of a Belgian General and two Colonels. They had closed in on him (they were evidently all four at the end of their dinner); they had closed in on him in an access of emotion and enthusiasm. The General (the one who sat beside him) had his arm round Jimmy's shoulder; the two who sat facing him leaned towards Jimmy over half the table, and one grasped Jimmy's right hand in his; the other was making some sort of competitive demonstration. The disengaged arms of the three held up the glasses in which they were about to pledge him. And at the other end of the room a scattered group of soldiers rose to their feet and looked on smiling and signalling applause.

What was happening down there was public homage to Jimmy.

And in between the two dark Belgian uniforms that obscured him you could just see a bit of Jimmy's khaki, and from among the white and grizzled heads that pressed on him you saw Jimmy's face and Jimmy's flush and Jimmy's twinkle; his incredible, irrepressible twinkle. You could even see the tips of Jimmy's little front teeth trying to bite down his lip into some sort of composure. You could see that he was very shy and very modest; you could see that in spite of his shyness and his modesty he was frightfully pleased; but more than anything you could see that he was amused.

Positively, positively, he had the air of not taking his Belgian officers very seriously.

"We mustn't go down yet," said Viola, "or we'll spoil it."

So we waited, looking at Jimmy through the screen, while the officers clinked their glasses and drank to him and called his name; and the group that looked on echoed it; and the waiters who had come in to see what was happening, repeated it among themselves.

"Vive l'Angleterre! Vive les Anglais! Vive Chevons! Chevons! Chevons!"

"I wonder," said Viola, "what Jimmy has been up to? You can take me to him."

When we got to the table we found Jimmy trying to explain to the General and the two Colonels in execrable French that he didn't know what it was all about. *He* hadn't done anything.

Then he saw Viola.

For one second, while he stared at her across the room, he appeared to be suffering from a violent shock. He was so visibly hit that the two men who had their backs to us turned round to see what it was that had affected him. His flush had gone suddenly and he was breathing hard, with his mouth a little open.

I heard him saying something in French about his wife.

He recovered, however, in a second, and disentangled himself from the General and the Colonels and from the dinner-table, and came forward.

And as he came, I noticed something odd about him. He limped slightly. His khaki had a battered look; it was soiled and torn in places, and the Red Cross brassard on his sleeve was simply filthy.

And he had only been out three days, mind you. He was only three days ahead of us. But he had lost no time.

As they strolled up to each other and met midway in the big public room, in the fraction of time that passed

before their hands touched I heard him draw a hard, quivering breath and let it out in a long sigh. That breath was a suppressed cry of trouble and of acquiescence.

Then (I could have blessed him for it) he twinkled.

Viola said, "What *have* you been up to?"

And Jimmy, "I say, I like that! What are *you* doing here? Have you come to look at the Belfry?"

"No. I've come to look at *you!*" She put her hand on his shoulder.

He said, "That's a jolly rig-out you've got," and that was all.

The General and the two Colonels came forward and were presented to Mrs. Jevons; and Mr. Walter Furnival ("one of our war-correspondents") was presented to the General and the two Colonels. They saluted Madame; they begged Madame to accept their profoundest congratulations; they regretted that Madame had not been present just now when they were drinking her husband's health.

And the old General (the one with the white hair and imperial) informed her that Monsieur her husband had a very poor opinion of the Belgian Army.

"He has saved the lives of three Belgian officers and I do not know *how* many Belgian soldiers—and he says that it is nothing!"

And the stout, florid Colonel, who had been trying to look young and rakish ever since he had turned and caught sight of Viola, suggested that "Perhaps, if he had saved your British, he would not have said that it was nothing."

And the lean, iron-grey Colonel with the ferocious moustache remarked in an austere, guttural voice, *"Il est impayable—lui!"*

Jimmy had been offering cigarettes to them as if he thought that was the only thing that would stop them. Then the old white-haired General sat between Viola and

him with his arm round Jimmy's shoulder and began again, so loudly that everybody in the room could hear him.

"Your husband, Madame, is a man who does not know what fear is—who does not care what death is. For two nights and three days, Madame, he has been down there—at Alost and Termonde—under shell-fire. *Mais—un enfer, Madame!* You would have thought he had been born under fire, your husband. *Ce n'est pas un homme, c'est un salamandre.* Bullets—mitrailleuse—shrapnel—it is no more to him than to go out in a shower of rain. When our men were scuttling, and shouted to him to get under shelter, what do you think he said?—*'Ouvrir une parapluie—ça ne vaut pas la peine.'*"

There was a shout of laughter.

"That," said Viola, "is the sort of thing he *would* say. And please, I want to know what's the matter with his leg."

I can see her now, sitting on that crimson velvet seat in the lounge and looking past the gesticulations of the General to Jevons, who was shaking his head at her as much as to say, "Don't you believe the old boy, he's a shocking story-teller."

The old General seemed aware of her preoccupation, for he rose, murmuring affectionately, *"Mon petit Chevons.* I will not praise him to you, Madame. No doubt you know what he is."

I can see her standing up there and giving her hand to the old General and trying to stiffen her face to say, "I know."

Evidently she thought General Roubaix was too voluble to be entirely trustworthy, for, when he left us and Jimmy had gone out to see about our dinner, she addressed herself to the two Colonels.

"Please tell me what my husband *really* did."

Both the Colonels tried to tell her; but it was the younger one with the moustache (the one who had said that Jimmy was *"impayable"*) who satisfied her.

It was true, every bit of it. Jevons, it seemed, had been in the thick of the bombardment of Alost and in the fighting for the bridge at Termonde. His practice was to leave Kendal and the motor-car behind him in some place of shelter while he walked into the fire. Sometimes he took his Belgian stretcher-bearers with him, sometimes, when they didn't like the look of it, he went by himself. He didn't care, the Colonel said, *where* he went or how. If it was through rifle-fire or mitrailleuse he went on his hands and knees—he wriggled on his stomach. If it was shrapnel he took his chance. He had saved one of his three officers by carrying him straight out of his own battery, when the German guns had found its range; and he had driven his car, by himself, across a five-mile-long field, under a hailstorm of shrapnel, to get the other two.

"You see," the Colonel expounded, "your husband has chosen the most dangerous of all field ambulance work. Those high-speed scouting cars, running low on the ground, can go where a big ambulance cannot. It is magnificent what he has done."

When Jevons came back they could still hardly keep their eyes off him; they could hardly tear themselves away. It was *"À demain, Monsieur,"* and *"À demain, Colonel,"* as if they had arranged another deadly tryst.

"Well," said Jimmy, "how do you like them?"

"Oh—they're dears," said Viola, "especially the one with the moustache. Do you know, they've told me everything except what's the matter with your leg."

"My leg?" said Jimmy. "A bit of shell barked it. I'm jolly glad it's my leg and not my hand."

I was a little frightened when Viola left us alone after dinner. I thought he would pitch into me for bringing her. But he only said sadly, "You oughtn't to have brought her, Furny. But I suppose you couldn't stop her."

I said, No, I couldn't stop her. But I hadn't brought her. She had brought me.

We sat on till the lounge was open to the guests of the hotel. And when the war-correspondents began to drop in I saw that Jevons was uneasy.

"D'you mind if I turn in, old man?" he said.

I asked him if his wound was hurting him.

He stooped and caressed it pensively.

"No," he said. "Not a bit. I like my wound. It—it makes me feel manly."

Presently he said good night and left me.

I thought—yes, I certainly thought—that he exaggerated his limp a little as he crossed the room, and for a moment I wondered, "Is he playing up to the correspondents?"

Then I saw that Viola stood in the doorway waiting for him and that she gave him her arm.

And then through the glass screen I saw them going together up the stair. And I remembered the tale that he had told me nine years ago, how he had seen her standing there and looking down at him—half frightened—through the glass screen, and how he had said to me, "I couldn't. She was so helpless somehow—and so pretty—that for the life of me I couldn't."

It was the same room and the same glass screen and the same stair. And it was the same man. I knew him. I knew him. I had always known him. (Was there ever any risk he hadn't taken?) I had never, really, for one moment misunderstood.

I certainly knew why he "liked" his wound.

XIV

We had breakfast very early the next morning, for Jevons was under orders to start at eight o'clock for Termonde. We had a table reserved for us in a corner of the restaurant. The hotel was full of Belgian officers, and I found I was infinitely better off in attaching myself to Jevons than if I had joined the war-correspondents.

Viola (I may say that her rig-out which Jevons had admired so much, the khaki tunic and breeches, made us terribly conspicuous) had come down in a contrite mood. I heard her telling Jevons that he must be kind to me, for I had had an awful time with her and I had been an angel.

Well, I had had an awful time; I don't think I remember ever having had a worse time than the hours I had spent in her company since she had laid into me on Tuesday evening.

But I had not been an angel; far from it. Looking back on those hours, I can see that I behaved to her like a perfect brute.

She had her revenge. One of those revenges that are the more triumphant because they are unpremeditated. She had dished me as a war-correspondent.

For I declare that from the moment when we found Jevons and his General in the hotel I became the victim of her miserable point of view. I could only see the war through Jevons, and as a part of Jevons; I might have said, like Viola, that to me Ghent was Jevons, and Belgium

was Jevons, and the war was Jevons. I suppose I saw as much of the War from first to last as any Special Correspondent at the front, and I know, that, barring the Siege of Antwerp, the three weeks when Jimmy was in it were by no means the most important or the most thrilling weeks in the war; and of the one event, the Siege of Antwerp, I didn't see as much as I ought to have seen, being most terribly handicapped by Viola. And yet—perhaps a little because of Viola, but infinitely more because of Jevons—those three weeks stand out in my memory before the battles of the Aisne and Marne and the long fight for Calais. Because of Jevons I have made them figure, in the columns of the *Morning Standard* and elsewhere, with a superior vividness; even now when I recall them I seem to have lived with Jevons in Flanders through long periods of time.

I have the proof of my obsession before me in a letter from the editor of the *Morning Standard,* dated October the twelfth. He says, "We are interested, of course, in anything relating to Mr. Tasker Jevons, and his performances seem to have been remarkable. You have written a very fine account of Melle, which I understand is a small village four and a-half miles from Ghent. But there are other events—the Fall of Antwerp, for instance."

Well, we got the story of the Fall of Antwerp all right. But Jimmy wrote it for me. It was the last thing he did write.

Yes: he had only three weeks of it, all told. He went out on Tuesday, September the twenty-second, and he came back on Tuesday, October the thirteenth. It was his infernal luck that he should have had no more of it.

And yet, I don't know. I don't see how he could have held out much longer at his pitch of intensity. Three weeks would have been nothing to any other man. But

Jevons could do more with three weeks than another man could do with a three years' campaign, and he contrived to crowd into his term the maximum of glory and of risk. And when it was all over it was less as if Fate had foiled him than as if he had "given" himself three weeks.

But Jimmy was discontented, and every morning at breakfast we listened to the most extraordinary lamentations. His job, he said, wasn't at all the jolly thing it looked. For he was under orders the whole blessed time. He'd no more freedom, hadn't Jimmy, than that poor devil of a waiter. He'd got to go or to stay where a fussy old ram of a Colonel sent him. So here he was in Ghent, an open city, when he wanted to be in Antwerp. He hadn't been anywhere—anywhere at all. As for what he'd done, he couldn't see what the fuss was all about. He hadn't done anything. He'd seen a little fight in a turnip-field, and a little squabble for a bridge you could blow up to-day and build again to-morrow, and a little tin-pot town peppered. And look at the war! Just look at the war!

And when we tried to cheer him up with the prospect of a second Waterloo, the Waterloo that all the war-correspondents said was coming off next week, he refused to listen to what he called our putrid gabble. There wouldn't be any Waterloo next week or the week after, he said. "There won't be any Waterloo for another two years, if then."

He wasn't always lugubrious. It was only when he thought that he was missing the Siege of Antwerp that his happiness was incomplete.

It was on our third morning, when he rushed off joyously (to Quatrecht, I think), that I said to Viola, "You thought it would hurt him more than other people. You needn't have come out after him. You see how much it's hurting him."

"I'm glad I came," she said. "I don't mind as long as I can see."

"Do you remember him telling Reggie that he wouldn't be in the war because he was a coward? Don't you wish Reggie could see him now?"

She didn't answer, and I saw that there was still a sting for her in Reggie's name. The war might have made her forgive him, but there were things that the war couldn't wipe out from her memory. And there was her own rather appalling injustice to Jimmy. I wondered whether she was thinking of how she had tried to stop his going to the front, and how she had said he didn't want to go.

But I had to own that she had done the best thing for her peace of mind by coming out.

My peace of mind, I was told quite frankly, didn't matter. Jevons, though he admitted that I couldn't have stopped her coming out, made me responsible for her presence at the seat of war. The trouble was that she insisted on following him wherever he went. And as it wasn't to be expected that he would take her with him into the tight places that he managed to get into in his own car, I had to have her in mine. Not that Viola consented to my putting it that way. It was clear that she made herself mistress of the situation when she obtained possession of that car and manœuvred (as I am convinced she *did* manœuvre) for my own failure with the firm that supplied it. On our first morning in Ghent we came to what she called an understanding, when she rubbed it well into me that it was her own car and her own chauffeur that she had brought out, and that the man was under her orders, not mine. If I liked to come with her, why, of course I could. Otherwise, I could go halves with one of the other correspondents in one of their cars. But she pointed out that I

could hardly do better than come with her, for by simply following Jimmy I should get nearer to the firing-line than anybody else. (She had assumed that the firing-line was the goal of every war-correspondent's ambition.) I would find, she said, that it would work quite well.

It did. It worked better than if I had gone halves with the other correspondents. For at this time war-correspondents were not greatly loved by the military authorities, and they were having considerable difficulty in getting near anything, and the time, Jimmy said, was coming when they would be cleared neck and crop out of Belgium. My astute sister-in-law had calculated on all this and on her own part in it.

"If you'll only trust me, Wally," she said the first day we started, when all the correspondents in the hotel had turned out to see us off, "you'll find that I'm your Providence and not your curse. I can get you through where you'd never get yourself. Just look at those men how sick they are."

I said I thought it would be only decent to take two or three of them with us. We had room.

But Viola was firm. She said it would be most *in*-decent. We should want all the room we had for our wounded.

"Do you suppose I'm going to chivy Jimmy about without doing anything to help him? As for you, you've only to sit tight and do what you're told. You'll be all right as long as we follow Jimmy."

And so we followed him. My God, what a chase! But Viola's little chauffeur was game and we followed. Though Jimmy had made elaborate arrangements for stopping his wife's progress at least two miles outside the danger-zone she always managed to get through. Sentries, colonels, army medical officers—she twisted them into

coils round her little finger, and cast them from her and got through. And once through, we were really quite useful in transporting wounded. Jevons and I between us managed to keep her out of the actual firing-line by telling her she was in all of it there was; and when we were loaded up with wounded there was no difficulty in getting her away.

And certainly it served my turn well enough. Though I was compelled to see the war through Jimmy, I saw the war.

By the end of our first week Jimmy seemed to get used to being followed as a matter of course. We had followed him to Alost and Termonde and Quatrecht and Zele. When we weren't following him we were near him somewhere, working at the dressing-stations or among the refugees.

Then he did a mean thing. He managed to get himself sent to Antwerp for three days. He sneaked off there by himself on the Sunday, and when we tried to follow him we were turned back at Saint Nicolas, just too late to see the British go through. He had worked it this time.

When he got back from Antwerp at the end of his three days we knew that something had happened, something that he was keeping from us. It wasn't only the fate of Antwerp that was hanging over him, as it hung over all of us in that awful second week. It was as if he had seen something intimate and terrible that he couldn't talk about.

That night after Viola had gone to her room he told me what had happened. He had seen Charlie Thesiger's regiment at Saint Nicolas on Sunday. And to-day—which was Tuesday—he had seen Charlie Thesiger. He had found him lying dangerously wounded in the British Hospital at Antwerp. That, he said, was what had kept

him there. And he had brought him back with him to Ghent. He was in the Couvent de Saint Pierre.

He thought, perhaps, it would be better not to tell Viola just yet. Charlie didn't know, he said, that she was here.

The war was beginning to close round us.

The next day (Wednesday) he announced that he was going to Zele; but he didn't, he really didn't want me to take Viola there. I could go by myself, of course, if I liked, though he didn't care about her being left.

But we did go. Viola's blood was up, after what she called Jimmy's meanness, and there was no keeping her back.

We were a little uncertain of our way, for following Jimmy as we did, or rather, following the direction Colville swore he had seen him start in, took us much too far to the north. We found ourselves on the Antwerp road, jammed in the traffic, and caught by a stream of refugees. We were obliged to turn back to Ghent to get our bearings, but the business of transporting women and children kept us on the Antwerp road all morning, and it was past two o'clock before we started for Zele.

I remember this particular chase after Jimmy for many reasons. First, we lost our way and never got to Zele at all.

Down in the south-east on the sky-line we saw a fleet of little clouds that seemed to be anchored to the earth, and every cloud of the fleet was the smoke from a burning village. West of the fleet was an enormous cloud blown by the wind across miles of sky.

Viola was certain that the big cloud was Zele being burned to the ground, and that Jimmy would be burned with it.

When I told her that it wasn't likely that Jimmy would

stay in Zele when it was burning she said that I didn't know Jimmy, and anyhow it was there that she was going.

Suddenly Viola sat up very straight.

"Furny, is that guns I hear, or thunder?"

I said it was guns. A deep and solemn booming came from before and behind us and on either side, east and west. We had rushed bang between the French and German batteries.

The big cloud turned out to be smoke from a factory that the Belgians had set fire to themselves, and in following it we had gone miles from Zele. Now we followed the guns.

We turned east and struck off south and found ourselves in the village of Baerlere. The lines of fire seemed suddenly to narrow in on us here.

There was a clean path down the centre of the street, for men and horses stood back close under the house-walls on each side. The place was full of soldiers. One of them told us that we could get to Zele by going east through the village, but as the road was being shelled, he didn't advise us to try.

We went down that clean middle of the street. We were safe enough as long as we ran between the houses; but the village very soon came to an end, and then, in the open road, we were in for it.

The fields dropped away from us on each side, leaving us as naked to the German batteries as if we were running on a raised causeway. At the bottom of the fields to our right there was a line of willows, beyond the willows there was the river, and behind the river bank, on the further side, were the German lines.

The grey smoke of their fire was still tangled in the willow-tops.

Colville drew up under the lee of the last house in the

village. He didn't like the look of that open road. Neither did I.

"Go on," said Viola. "What are you stopping for?"

The guns ceased firing for a moment and we rushed it.

"I do wish," said Viola, "you'd tuck your arm in, Furny. It's your right arm and you're on the wrong side of the car."

I asked her what made her think of my right arm just then.

"Because it's the only part of himself that Jimmy ever thinks of," she said.

There was about three-quarters of a mile of causeway and it ended in a little hamlet. And the hamlet—it had been knocked to bits before we got into it—the hamlet ended in a hillock of bricks and mortar.

The road to Zele was completely blocked.

"Well—" said Colville, "I *am* blowed."

"You've got to take it," said Viola.

"Sorry, m'm. It can't be done. You want a motor traction with caterpillar wheels for this business."

He was backing the car when a shell burst and buried itself in the place where we had stood.

To my horror I saw that Viola had opened the door of the car and was getting out.

"What on earth are you doing?" I said.

"I'm going to walk to Zele."

I pulled her back and held her down in her seat by main force. She was horribly strong. And as she struggled with me she said quietly, "It's all right. You two *must* go back and I must go to Jimmy."

I shouted to Colville, "Turn her round, can't you, and get out of this."

He turned her. He drew up deftly under the shelter of a barn that still stood intact. Then he spoke.

"Are you quite sure, sir, that Mr. Jevons is in that place? Because, sir, I heard Kendal say something this morning about their going to Antwerp."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so?"

"I didn't think of it, sir, until I saw Mrs. Jevons getting out."

He added by way of afterthought, "Besides, I promised Kendal. You and Mrs. Jevons wasn't to know he was going on to Antwerp."

Viola and I looked at each other and burst out laughing.

Somewhere behind us from beyond the river a gun boomed and we took no notice of it. We went on laughing.

"He's had us again," she said.

"Yes. We've been done this time. Well—we'd better scoot."

We made a rush for it between guns and got to Baerlere. Once we were out of the village and heading for the Ghent road we were safe.

We were hardly out of sound of the guns when I heard Viola saying, "You know it really *was* funny of Jimmy."

I said, "He won't think it quite so funny when he hears what we've done."

He didn't think it funny at all. He was furious when he heard what we'd done. He forbade Viola to follow him again. He threatened to sack Colville. He said he'd have me sent home to-morrow and kept there, and Viola should go with me.

And when he'd finished he told us that Antwerp had fallen.

That was how Jevons came to write the story of the Fall of Antwerp instead of me.

Well, he didn't sack Colville; and he didn't get me packed off with the other war-correspondents who left Ghent in a body the next day. And he said nothing about sending Viola away. He did better than that. He told her he had brought Charlie Thesiger from Antwerp yesterday, and that her cousin was dying in the Couvent de Saint Pierre, and that perhaps it would be a bit easier for him if she were with him.

We took her to the convent that morning. On the way there she asked Jimmy why he hadn't told her about Charlie yesterday. He said that up till midnight we weren't absolutely certain that Charlie wouldn't recover, and that she was safer with us in the hotel than she would be away from us in the convent.

"My safety is to be considered before everything?" she said.

He answered that it was surely enough for her if he risked it now.

I can't think why she didn't see through him. I and Kendal and Colville knew perfectly well that he was taking her to the convent to be safe. I think he argued that if she had poor Charlie to look after it would keep her quiet, and she would be out of mischief till it was time for the Germans to march into Ghent.

So we took her to him.

We found him in a little whitewashed cell that one of the sisters had given up to him. He lay under a crucifix on the nun's narrow bed, which was too short for him, so that his naked feet showed through the blankets at the bottom. The naked feet of the Christ pointed downwards to his head.

He had been shot through the lungs and was dying of pneumonia, sending out his breath in fierce, rapid jerks.

He lay on his side with his back towards us, and his face was hidden from us as we came in.

The sister who sat with him made a sign that said, "Oh yes, you can come in, all of you; it will make no difference."

The cell was so small that Jevons and I had to draw back and let Viola go in by herself. We two stood in the doorway and looked in. After the first glance at the bed —it was enough for me—I looked, I couldn't help looking, at Viola. (Jevons, I noticed, kept his eyes fixed on the body of the dying man.) I heard her catch her breath in a sob before she could have seen him.

He had slipped his blankets from his shoulder, and it was the sight of his back—under the half-open hospital shirt which showed the bandages and dressings of his wound—that upset her; his back that might have been any man's back, the innocent back that she had no memory of, that disguised and hid him from her and made him strange to her and utterly pathetic. And then, there was the back of his head, sunk like lead into his pillow. The cropped hair had begun to grow. You could see a little greyish tuft. You wouldn't have known that it was Charlie's head.

She went slowly round the bed, taking care not to graze the feet that were stretched out to her. And then she saw him.

She saw a deep purplish flush and glazed eyes that couldn't see her, and a greyish beard pointing on an unshaved jaw; and a mouth half open, jerking out its breath. She laid her left hand on his shoulder and with her right she held the limp hand that hung over the mattress.

I heard her say in French, "If only he knew me——"

And the nun, "Perhaps—at the end—he will know you."

And we left her there with his hand in her right hand and her left hand on his shoulder. She was on her honour to stay with him till the end; but her eyes were fixed on Jevons, and they followed him as he went through the doorway of the cell.

The very minute he had left her Jimmy made his bolt for Lokeren. He said he didn't want me; but I had seen Viola's eyes, and I said it would be safer. If I took Viola's car and Colville, she couldn't follow us.

"She won't follow us," he said. "She can't leave him."

We made the first bolt into Lokeren together; and we got out, each with a load of wounded, just as the Germans were coming in. He made his second bolt by himself and secretly, while Colville and I were lunching. We followed, and were stopped in a village two miles from Lokeren.

A Belgian Red Cross man met us here and told us that Jevons had got through in spite of them, and they didn't in the least expect him to come back again. He shrugged his shoulders and seemed to be disgusted and annoyed with Jimmy rather than to admire him.

We hung about in that village an interminable time. I do not remember its name, if I ever knew it; but I know and remember every house in it and every tree in the avenue at the turn of the grey road that led to Lokeren, and even now, in my worst dreams, I find myself in the little plantation at the end of the village on the left where the railway siding is, and where the trains came in loaded with wounded. I am always waiting for Jimmy and looking for Jimmy and not finding him. And at one point I always stumble over Viola's body. I find her lying wounded in a ditch that runs through the plantation. And when I find her I know that Jimmy is dead. And

that frightens me—Jimmy's death, I mean, not Viola's body. I take Viola's body as a matter of course.

It is an abominable dream.

But even that dream is not more astonishing, and it is far less improbable than what I was to see. We were at the end of the village. Colville had drawn our car up in the middle of the street, and I was standing by him, when two Belgian soldiers rushed up to us, pointing up the road, and shouting to Colville to clear out of the way.

I turned. Round the bend of the road where the avenue of trees was I saw a train of horses and gun-carriages careening with the curve, and a battery of Belgian artillery came charging down in full retreat. And now in the middle of the battery as if he were part of it and informed it with his energy and speed, and now in front of it as if he led it, and joyous as if he had turned its retreat into a victory, came Jimmy driving his car.

The inside of the car was packed with wounded men; and, wedged up against Jimmy, and standing on the steps, and sitting on the bonnet, and hanging on wherever they could find a foothold and hang, were seven officers and soldiers of the Belgian Army.

Kendal—bleeding profusely from a flesh wound on his forehead, but otherwise unhurt—sat inside among the wounded.

It *had* been a victory for Jimmy. He had advanced within fifty yards of the German lines, he had picked up two of his wounded from under their sentry's fire, and the rest of the men and the officers he had gathered on his way.

We sent them all to Ghent with Colville.

Before he left, Kendal implored us just to look at Mr. Jevons's car.

Mr. Jevons's car was worth looking at. It had a hole

in the back of it where a bullet had gone clean through and buried itself in the cushions. There were five bullet-holes in its hood. Its flank was scraped by a flying fragment of shell, the same that had tilted its right rear splash-board. Inside, its canvas covers and its rubber mat were stained with blood.

Drawn up motionless in that village street and stared at, Jimmy's car had something of its old self-conscious air. It looked pleased, and at the same time surprised at itself.

And while Jevons was dressing and bandaging his flesh-wound for him an idea struck Kendal and he grinned.

"D'you remember the time, sir, when you wouldn't let her out if there was a spot of rain?"

"I do," said Jevons.

"And look at her now—not three weeks. *What* a life she's 'ad!"

And when Kendal (he was as pleased as Punch with his bandage) when Kendal had climbed into Colville's car, Jimmy turned *his* round again; though the officers implored him to come on, for the Germans were on our backs. But Jimmy only jerked his thumb in the direction of Lokeren and made his third bolt. I scrambled in beside him as he started.

I don't mind saying that I hated this adventure. It was one thing to go into Antwerp when the Germans were so busy storming it that they couldn't attend to you, and quite another thing to be alone with Jimmy on that horrid grey road with the Germans coming every minute round the turn of it.

Jimmy explained that there was a wounded man hiding in a ditch about a mile from Lokeren, and he'd got to fetch him.

We fetched him and another car-load without any misadventure.

When we got back to our village we found a Field Ambulance there. Jimmy said, "I believe that's *my* Field Ambulance." Presently he gave a start that made the car swerve as if he had run over a dog.

"Well, I'm damned if there isn't Viola."

Yes, there she was. She had come out with the Field Ambulance. And it *was* Jimmy's Field Ambulance, the one that had been sent out without him. It had come on into Ghent from Antwerp yesterday, and Viola had found it.

"This is too bad," said Jevons. "You ought to be looking after Charlie. Why *aren't* you looking after him?"

"Charlie," she said, "died three hours ago—at twelve o'clock."

It wasn't five hours since we had left her with him in the nun's cell under the crucifix. I don't think I had realized it before, but now it came over me as a new and strange thing, how little he had mattered. Then it struck me that Jevons must have known it all the time.

"I've done everything," she said, "that had to be done. And I've written to Aunt Matty and Uncle George—and Mildred."

"Mildred?" I wondered.

"Well—*yes.*"

Jevons and I had forgotten Mildred. We had forgotten her engagement to Charlie, though I suppose nobody knew better than we did why it had been broken off.

To his father and mother and Mildred he *did* matter.

And perhaps he mattered to Viola, in a way; for she said she would have given anything to have saved him. He must have mattered to Jevons when he brought him from Antwerp and when we buried him in Ghent.

And the cross on his grave reproves me, reminding me that to his country he mattered supremely, after all.

After Lokeren Jevons and I tried to come to terms with Viola.

The conference took place upstairs in their bedroom, where we had withdrawn for greater privacy. Viola sat on the one chair and Jimmy and I on the bed. Jimmy did most of the talking.

He said, "Look here, my dear child, if there wasn't a war on, I wouldn't stand in the way of your amusement for the world. And there's a great deal to be said for you. *I* think you adorable in a tunic and breeches, and General Roubaix agrees with me, if Furny doesn't. We all think you heroic, and you are sometimes useful. But there isn't a thing you've done yet that a man can't do better—except getting Furny through the lines, and nobody wants Furny *in* the lines. And when *you're* in them you've a moral effect equal to about ten seventeen-inch guns. If the men see you hovering round their trenches they're so jumpy they can hardly hold their rifles. If Kendal sees you he's so jumpy he can hardly steer. Colville says he'd rather hang himself than go through another day like Baerlere. Furny all but lost his job on the *Morning Standard* because he was told off to look after you when he ought to have gone to Antwerp—he *would* have lost it if I hadn't done his work for him. And you don't make things easier for *me*. Good God!—sometimes I don't know what I'm doing.

"It isn't fair on us. It isn't fair."

"It isn't fair on *me*," she said. "*I'm* jumpy when I'm kept back. You don't know what it's like, Jimmy. *Don't* turn me back."

And the poor child began to talk about her duty to the wounded, and that made him burst out again.

"The wounded? If you think you're any more comfort to the wounded than you are to Furny and me I can tell you you're mistaken. There was a poor devil at Lokeren the other day with a bullet in his stomach who told me he didn't mind his wounds and he didn't mind the Germans; what worried him was the lady being there when he wasn't able to defend her."

She tilted her chin at that and said she didn't want anybody to defend her.

"Perhaps you don't, but what would you think of a man who didn't want to defend you? What would you think of Furny and me if we wanted you to be here?"

"I should like you to want me," she said.

"No, my dear child, you wouldn't. You don't know what you're saying."

And then he said, "I know better than you do what you want. Men aren't made like that—if they *are* men. You can't have it both ways." And he said something about chivalry that drove her back in sheer self-defence on a Feminist line. She said that nowadays women had chivalry too.

"And *our* chivalry is to go down before yours?"

"Can't you have both?"

"Not in war-time. *Your* chivalry is to keep back and not make yourself a danger and a nuisance."

"Come," she said, "what about Joan of Arc?" And that was too much for Jimmy. He jumped up off the bed and walked away from her and sat on the table as if it gave him some advantage.

"No, no," he said. "I can't stand that rot. When you're a saint—or I'm a saint—you can talk about Joan of Arc. If you want to be Joan of Arc go and be it with

some man who isn't your husband—who isn't in love with you. Perhaps *he* won't mind. Go with Furny if you like, though it's rather hard on him."

I said I thought he was rather hard on Viola—if he'd seen the poor child at Baerlere, flinging herself out of the car and proposing to climb over the ruins of several houses and walk by herself—under shell-fire—to Zele, because she thought he was there——

Jimmy looked at her; and he did what he had done that night when he saw her coming towards him in the lounge. He sighed a long sigh of complicated anguish and satisfaction.

She heard it and she understood it, and she said, "I can't help it if I am like that. You'll have to take the risk of me. Please go away, Furny."

And I went.

Norah has been reading what I've just written, and she tells me that there's a great deal about Jimmy's "joy" and his "adventure" and all that; and not one word about his duty and devotion and self-sacrifice. She says I don't give a serious impression of him. He might have gone out to the war just for fun, and that it isn't fair to him.

I don't know whether it's fair or not. I write as he compels me to write. I find that I cannot separate his joy and his adventure from his duty and devotion and self-sacrifice; he didn't separate them himself. I don't even know that self-sacrifice is really the word for it; and the impression he gave me is just that—of going out for fun. It was the wild humour of his devotion that made it the spectacle it was.

(She has told me that it's all right, so long as I recognize that it *was* devotion.)

After Lokeren I had no desire to go through the rest of

the war with Jimmy. To be with Jimmy was destruction to your sense of values. I have got it firmly fixed in my head that the taking of Lokeren was an important affair.

As for what Jimmy called the "tinpot bombardment of Melle" (there was nothing wrong with *his* sense of values), I shall see it insanely, for ever and ever, as *the* event of the war.

And there is this to be said, that Lokeren filled the last gap in the line closing round Ghent, north, south and east, and drew it tighter. And Melle (only four and a-half miles away) was the last point in the German advance on Ghent. The taking of Melle would be a sign to us that the game was up.

For three days Jimmy operated joyously in the village and over the leagues of turnip-fields that lay outside it.

Of the first two days I remember an endless tramping over endless furrows that were ditches for the dead; an endless staggering under stretchers that dripped blood; an endless struggling with Viola to keep her under shelter of the walls; each of those acts seemed to be endless, though one gave place to the other, and it was only the firing that went on all the time, till even Jimmy complained once or twice that he was fed up with it.

I remember that Jimmy's Field Ambulance played a great part in these adventures. I remember feeling a malicious satisfaction in the thought that at the same time it was compelled to witness *his* performances. It couldn't miss him.

I remember all these things; but of Melle itself I remember nothing but the Town Hall, with its double flight of steps up to its door, and the two tall stone pillars, one on each side of the door, and the Greek pediment above it; that and the little old Flemish house that stood back by itself on the other side of the road, and its white walls

and its red-tiled roof, and the two green poplars in its garden, mounting guard. The house and its garden and its poplars are always vivid and still; they always appear to me as charged with mystery and significance and as connected in some secret way with Jimmy's fate.

In the pauses of our movements the Field Ambulance and Jimmy's car and Viola's were always drawn up before the Town Hall, facing the little house.

Then came Sunday, the eleventh, the third day of Melle, when Viola was left behind at Ghent.

Jimmy had made her promise on her honour to be brave, *this* time, and stay in the hotel and wait for orders.

Colville stayed with her. They were to pack our things and be ready to leave at a minute's notice. Colville had secret orders that, if we were not back by midnight, he was to take Viola on to Bruges in his car, and wait for us there.

For we knew now that we were in for it.

And we knew that the war, which was coming closer and closer to the city, was coming closer to us. It had been Charlie Thesiger first, now it might be Reggie. At least, we knew that Reggie's regiment, the Third ——shires, had come up from Ostend the day before, that it was quartered somewhere between Ghent and Melle, and that it had been engaged at Quatrecht.

Our own orders were to stick to Melle.

I suppose from the way the ambulances were massed there that the end had been foreseen. That afternoon the battle began to sweep round from Quatrecht to Melle; and on our third journey out a rumour reached us at the barrier where the sentry stood guard. It was one of those preposterous rumours that run before disaster and are started God knows how when a retreat begins. I think it was the Belgian Red Cross men who spread it, for I

heard the guide who went with Jimmy's Field Ambulance assuring him seriously that seven thousand British had been surrounded and cut to pieces on the road between Quatrecht and Melle. To be sure the number diminished with each repetition of the tale, dropping from seven thousand to seven hundred and from seven hundred to seventy. But in another hour we were bringing in the men of the ——shires.

And towards the end of the day the real bombardment of Melle began, and on our last journey out we and Jimmy's Field Ambulance were in the thick of it.

I can remember nothing of that bombardment but the three shells.

The first ripped open the roof of the Town Hall and set fire to it.

The second struck the Greek pediment and brought the whole front toppling into the street.

Then, about five minutes after, there was the third shell.

The light was going out of the sky, so that we saw the first shell like a sheet of curved lightning making for the village as we approached from the Ghent side. There was a deadly attraction about the thing that made you feel that it and you were the only objects in God's universe, and that you were about to be merged in each other. It looked as if it were rushing out of heaven straight for us, so that we were surprised when it apparently swerved aside and hit the Town Hall instead.

(Jimmy and I were in the front of the car. Kendal, whose flesh wound was beginning to worry him, sat behind.)

A battery of artillery charged past us, followed by the remnants of a French regiment on the run. Jimmy put

more speed on. By the time we got into the village the Town Hall was spouting flame.

Jimmy drew up his car about fifty yards away from it. The Field Ambulance had turned, and took its stand a little further away behind us, under the cover of the opposite walls. Its men began dragging out their stretchers. Kendal and I made ready with ours. The wounded were being brought out of every house they were in.

A Belgian Colonel rode past us, trying to look unaware that he was retreating. He shouted to us to clear out of it. This was the only sign of interest that he showed.

Somebody else came up to Jevons and told him that there were three or four wounded men somewhere inside the Town Hall, but that the place was on fire and it was absolutely impossible to get them out. He advised us to pick up the men who were lying in the street, and clear out.

I saw Jevons nod his head as if he agreed and consented. I saw him get out of the car. And then I heard Kendal say, "Give us a hand, sir," and I turned to my stretchers.

When I looked round again Jevons was running towards the Town Hall. The man who had told us to pick up our wounded and clear out was looking after him with a face of the most perfect horror.

Kendal and I followed with the stretchers, and we saw Jevons run up the steps of the Town Hall. He turned at the top of the steps and waved to us to keep back.

Then he went through the big doors between the pillars.

There was a crash and a roar as if the whole building had fallen in. It was the top story plunging to the second floor. The upper half of the Town Hall was like a crate filled with blazing straw. The Greek pediment was the only solid thing that subsisted in that fire.

Then the first floor was caught. It burned more slowly.

Kendal and I and the ambulance men ran forward with the stretchers. And Jimmy came through the doors carrying a wounded Frenchman. He went in again and came out with another Frenchman.

(The ground floor had begun to burn behind him.)

He went in a third time and came out with Reggie Thesiger.

He must have had to go further into the hall to find him, for it was a much longer business. We, Kendal and I, were down the street by the ambulance when they came out, and I didn't see that it was Reggie till I heard Kendal say, "Sir, that's Major Thesiger he's got!"

Reggie's arm was round Jimmy's shoulder and Jimmy's arm was round Reggie's waist. He half carried, half supported him. He came out in the middle of a cloud of smoke that hid him. The smoke was followed by a burst of fire and another crash and roar as the ceiling of the first story plunged to the ground floor.

With all this going on behind him Jevons paused on the top of the steps to readjust his burden to the descent. We heard afterwards that Reggie had said, "You'd better leave me, old man, and scoot. You can't do it."

It didn't look as if he could. But as we went back to them we saw that Jevons had heaved Reggie over his shoulder and was carrying him down the steps. He came very carefully and slowly, so that we had reached the Town Hall before he had staggered to the last step.

As we pressed closer to help him he told us to get back if we didn't want the whole damned place down on the top of us.

We gave back and he followed us. I don't know how we got Reggie on to the stretcher—he had a piece of shell somewhere in his thigh—but we did it and ran with him

to the ambulance. We had about a minute to do it in and no more.

And then the second shell came.

It hit the Greek pediment from behind, and we saw the two tall pillars that supported it stagger, snap like two sticks, and bend forwards, looking suddenly queer and corpulent in their fore-shortening; then they parted and fell, bringing down the whole front of the Town Hall.

The Town Hall was spreading itself over the street, with a noise like a ship's coal going down the shute in a thunderstorm, as Reggie's stretcher slid home along its grooves in the ambulance. Kendal and I were inside for a second or two doing things for Reggie. The engine throbbed. The whole ambulance shook with its throbbing.

In that second Jevons had run back to fetch his car, calling out to us to cut and he would overtake us. He had cranked up his engines and jumped in before Kendal could get down and go to his help. When we saw him start we started. There wasn't any time to lose.

Kendal and I were sitting on the back steps of the ambulance, so that we kept him in sight. It was quite certain that he would overtake us.

He was running straight down the middle of the road when the third shell came.

It burst on the ground behind him, on his right, a little to one side. Some of it must have struck the steering gear.

The car plunged to the left. It climbed reeling to the top of a bank and paused there, then fell, front over back, into the ditch and lay there, belly uppermost, and its wheels whirling in the air.

Jevons lay on his face, half in, half out of the ditch.

He lay for about three seconds; then, as we ran to him, we saw him raise himself on his left arm and crawl out of the ditch; and when we reached him he was trying to stand.

And he tried to smile at us. "You needn't look like that," he said. "I'm as right as rain." And then he tried to raise his right arm.

You saw a khaki cuff, horribly stained. A red rag hung from it, a fringe that dripped.

Reggie opened his eyes and turned his face towards the stretcher that slid into its grooves beside him.

"That isn't—Jimmy—is it?" he said.

I saw him move his left hand to find Jimmy's right. And I heard Jimmy saying again (in a weak voice this time) that he was as right as rain.

We had got out of the range of the guns and the surgeons had done their business with bandages and splints. They had taken Reggie first, then Jimmy.

And so, lying beside Reggie, on his own stretcher and in his own ambulance, he was brought back to Ghent.

The military hospitals were full, so we took them to the Couvent de Saint Pierre. And I went over to the Hôtel de la Poste to fetch Viola.

I don't know what I said to her. I think I must have done what Jimmy told me and said they were all right. *She* never said a word till we got to the Convent. (She told me afterwards that when she saw me coming in alone she had been sure that Jimmy was killed. She didn't know about Reggie yet, you see.)

This part of it is all confused and horrible.

We had to wait before we could see our surgeons at the Convent. The nuns took us into a little parlour and left us there.

And I told her then what had happened. I can see her sitting in the nuns' parlour, looking out of the window as I told her; looking as if she wasn't listening. And I can hear my own voice. It sounded strange and affected, as if I had made it all up and didn't believe what I was telling her.

"He saved Reggie's life—do you see? at the risk of his own.

"At—the risk—of his own."

And still she looked as if she wasn't listening. It didn't sound as if it had really happened.

And I feel—now—as if I had taken hours to tell her.

Then one of our men came to us. He drew back when he saw Mrs. Jevons, and I followed him to the doorway. He said they were busy with Major Thesiger. They hadn't started yet with Mr. Jevons.

And then—ages afterwards—one of the surgeons came and called me out of the room. He said the Major would be all right. They'd got the bit of shell out. But—there was Jevons's hand. They'd have to take it off. They couldn't possibly save it. And it was going to be a beastly business. They'd run out of anæsthetics. Thesiger had had the last they'd got.

Yes, of course it would have been better. But Jevons wouldn't hear of it. *He* knew they were short and Thesiger didn't, and he'd insisted on their doing Thesiger first.

It was an awful mistake, he said, because it would hurt Jevons ten times more than it would hurt anybody else. He thought that I had better get Mrs. Jevons out of that room; the ward where they were operating was next to it.

I couldn't get her out of it.

There were five minutes when I sat there and Viola crouched on the floor beside me with her face hidden on my knees and her hands grabbing me tighter and tighter.

And the door opened and I saw two nuns looking in. I heard one say to another, *"C'est sa pauvre femme qui devient folle."* And the door closed on us.

"All that fuss about a hand!" Jimmy had come out of his faint and was trying to restore Viola to a sense of proportion. If all the rest of him had been blown away, he said, by that confounded shell, and only his hand had been left, she might have had something to cry for.

And yet she cried inconsolably for Jimmy's hand.

God knows what memories came to her when she thought of it. I don't think she thought of it as the hand that had written masterpieces and flung them aside, that could steer a car straight through hell-fire, and that could nurse, and bind up wounds. I know I thought of all these obvious things. But she must have thought of the hand that she knew like her own hand, the hand with the firm, nervous fingers, and the three strong lines in the pinkish palm, the hand she adored and had shrunk from, whose gesture had been torture to her and whose touch was ecstasy, the hand that the surgeons had cut off and tossed into a basket to be cast out with the refuse of the wards.

Not that either of us had much time for thinking of anything but how we could get out of Ghent before the Germans got into it. Viola said it would be quite easy. There was the ambulance, and there was *her* car and there was Jimmy's car.

I told her that Jimmy's god-like car was lying bottom upwards in a ditch between Ghent and Melle, an object half piteous, half obscene. She said it was a jolly good thing then that she'd brought hers. Perhaps it was.

We had just got Jimmy and Reggie into their first sleep

at six o'clock in the morning when the orders came for us to clear out.

We cleared out in Viola's car, with Reggie on his stretcher and Jimmy (propped up with pillows) at his head, and Viola at his feet, and two wounded men in front with Colville, and Kendal and me standing one on each step. (Most of our luggage was on the Boulevard in front of the Convent where we had left it.)

We went, as we had come, through Bruges. We drew up to rest in the Market Place under the Belfry.

"You'd better look at it while you can, Viola," said Jevons. "You may never see it again."

"I? I shall never see anything else," she said.

We looked at the Belfry. It was as if, under that menace of destruction, we saw it for the first time.

We *might* have enjoyed that run back, Viola said; only somehow we didn't. Reggie was ill from his anæsthetic all the way, and Jimmy's temperature went up with every mile, and we missed the boat at Ostend, and had to stay there all night; and Jimmy became delirious in the night and thought that he had left Viola behind in the Town Hall at Melle. And there was no room on the morning boat; and when we did get on board the Naval Transport at Dunkirk, Kendal took it into his head to be seasick till he nearly died.

We had no peace till seven o'clock on Tuesday, when we got to Canterbury.

XV

I THINK I have said that Jevons made me suffer. He did. I can say that before those three weeks of his all my contacts with him were infected by the poison of my suffering. But all that was nothing to what he made me suffer since, what I suffer now when I remember the things I have said of him, the things I have thought and felt—my furtive belittling of him, my unwilling admiration, the doubt that I encouraged in the mean hope that it would become a certainty.

I would give anything to be like the Canon or my wife, the only two of us whose conscience doesn't reproach them when they see Jimmy's right sleeve.

I remember Norah saying to me once, "I shall be sorry for *you* if you don't take care." Well, I am sorry for myself.

But I am still sorrier for Mrs. Thesiger.

I know there's a great deal to be said for her. I had wired to them from Dunkirk to tell them that Reggie was slightly wounded but recovering, and that the four of us would be in Canterbury that evening. It wasn't my fault if Reggie, being a British officer, was taken from us at Dover, and sent to a military hospital; but I admit I ought to have wired again to the Thesigers to inform them of the fact. I ought to have remembered that Reggie was more important to Mrs. Thesiger than Jevons, even if Jevons had done what Mrs. Thesiger didn't yet know he'd done.

The maternal passion is a terrible thing. It has made women commit crimes. It made my mother-in-law push Viola from her on her threshold and turn on me as I was helping Jimmy out of the car. It made her say, "You've brought my son-in-law. What have you done with my son?"

(To do her justice, she hadn't seen what had happened to Jimmy. Though he was tired and weak, he could still stand up and stagger along if you held him tight.)

And the maternal passion is not more terrible than the passion that Viola had for Jevons. It made her say to her mother as the Canon and I brought Jimmy in (the dear old man had seen in an instant why he wore his coat slung loose over his right shoulder), "You can see what we're doing with my husband."

And when we were all in the drawing-room and I was explaining gently that Reggie was all right, but that we'd *had* to send him to the military hospital, it made her say, "If it wasn't for your son-in-law your son wouldn't be alive."

God knows what thirst she satisfied, what bitterness she exhausted, what secret anguish she avenged.

They were all there, the Thesiger women—they had come, you see, to meet Reggie—Victoria and Millicent and Mildred; and they heard her. But it was Mildred who *saw*. She spoke to her mother.

"Can't you *see?*" she said.

Viola was kneeling by the sofa where her father had made Jimmy lie, and she had unbuttoned and taken from him his heavy coat. She looked at me and said, "Please take them away somewhere and tell them. Jimmy *is* so tired."

I know that must seem awful. It *was* awful to come back from the battlefields of Flanders, from sieges and

sackings and slaughter, and see the women flashing fire at each other. And they were mother and daughter. But, you see, they were women. I know that the war should have purged them of their passions (perhaps it did purge them); but your lover is your lover and your son your son for all that.

And it wasn't easy for Mrs. Thesiger to see how her son-in-law could have saved her son. I am not sure that she wouldn't have thought it presumption in Jevons to suppose that he could save anybody, let alone her son. There were people like the Thesigers from whom heroism was expected as a matter of course; and there were people like Jevons. You know what she said about his going to the front.

When I had finished the tale—and I let her have the whole of it, from the first shell that hit the Town Hall to the bit of the third shell that hit Jimmy—she said, "You mean that if he hadn't gone back for his car——" She had broken down and was sobbing quietly, but you could see how her mind worked.

I said, "I mean that if he hadn't gone back to the Town Hall to look for Reggie he wouldn't have been hit."

Then I told her how they took Jimmy's hand off.

I heard the Canon groan. Millicent and Victoria began to sob as their mother had sobbed. Mildred set her teeth firmly; and Mrs. Thesiger turned to me a queer, disordered face, and spoke.

"They—they gave the anæsthetic to—Reggie?"

"They did," I said. "Because Jimmy made them."

Yes. I am very sorry for Mrs. Thesiger.

She cried, softly, and with a great recovery of beauty and dignity, for about fifteen seconds (the Canon had gone back to Jevons); then she rose and addressed her daughter.

"Mildred dear, I think Jimmy had better have Reggie's room."

Then she went to him; and I am told that she kissed him for the first time. She kissed him as if he had been her son. (Poor Jimmy, I may say, was so tired that he didn't want to be kissed by anybody.)

He still had Reggie's room six weeks later when I came back from France for a week-end. Reggie had recovered, and was with them for a fortnight's leave before he went out again.

Norah and I went down on Saturday to see him. (His leave was up on Sunday night.)

Without Reggie I don't think I should have realized Jevons in his final phase.

He had been happy, I know, at Hampstead in the first two years of his marriage; he had been happy most of the time in Edwardes Square; even in Mayfair he had had moments; and Amershott had been, on the whole, an improvement on Mayfair. And he had lived through his three weeks in Ghent in a sort of ecstasy. And before that, all the time, there had been his work, which I am always forgetting, and his fame, when he didn't forget it.

But there had always been something.

At first it had been the Thesigers. As long as Mrs. Thesiger—as long as *one* Thesiger—held out against him he had felt defeat. And then there had been Reggie's return and his appalling doubt. He had pretended not to see his doubt and not to mind it. And he had seen it, as he saw everything, and he had minded awfully. Then came Viola's illness, which you could put down to Reggie's doubt. And after that it had been Viola pretty nearly all the time. And even at Ghent, by the tortures of

anxiety she had caused him, you may say that she had spoiled his ecstasy.

And now, without any effort, or any calculation or foresight, by a stupendous accident, he had found happiness and peace and certainty. The thing was so consummately done, and so timed to the minute, that when you saw him there enjoying it, you could have sworn that he had played for it and pulled it off. It was as if he had said to himself, "Give me time, and I'll bring all these people round, even Mrs. Thesiger, even Reggie. I'll *make* them love me. Wait, and you'll just see how I shall score."

And there he was scoring.

And it was as if he had said to himself long ago, "As for Viola, I know all about it. I know I do things that make the poor child shudder; but I can put that all right. I can make her forget it. I give myself three weeks." As if he said, "She thought she was going to leave me. I knew that, too, and I didn't care. She might have left me a thousand times and I should have brought her back."

I used to think it pathetic that Jevons should have wanted Mrs. Thesiger to love him—that he should have wanted Reggie to. But I must say his pathos was avenged. *They* were pathetic now. That big, hulking Major wasn't happy unless he was writing Jimmy's letters, or cutting up Jimmy's meat for him, or helping him in and out of his clothes. Mrs. Thesiger wasn't happy unless she was doing things for him. The Canon wasn't happy (though, like Norah, he had nothing on his conscience) and Mildred and Millicent and Victoria weren't happy, nor the Thesiger's friends in the Cathedral Close.

And then—after they had made a hero of him for six weeks—on that Saturday night when we were all together in the Canon's library, Jevons made his confession.

We had been exchanging reminiscences. Something had made Viola think of Jimmy's General and the two Colonels at Ghent. She began telling the Canon how we had watched them through the glass screen, and how funny General Roubaix had looked with his arm round Jimmy's neck, and how he had said that Jimmy was a salamander, and that he didn't know what fear is.

"Oh, *don't* I!" said Jimmy.

And that sent Reggie back to the day when he had first seen Jimmy.

"Look here, old man, what made you say you were an arrant coward?"

"Because," said Jimmy simply, "I am one. Dear old Roubaix was talking through his hat.

"Not know what fear is! I know a good many things, but I don't know anything better than that. You can't tell me anything about fear I don't know.

"You've no idea how I funked going out to the war. Yes—*funked.*

"It wasn't any ordinary funk, mind you, the little, creepy feeling in your waist, and your tummy tumbling down, and your heart sort of fluttering over the place where it used to be. I believe you can get over *that.* And I never had that—ever, except once when I saw Viola in a place where she'd no business to be. It was something much worse. It—it was in my head—in my brain. A sort of madness. And it never let me alone. It was worse at night, and after I got up and began to go about in the morning—when my brain woke and remembered, but it was there all the time.

"I saw things—horrors. And I heard them. I saw and heard the whole war. All the blessed time—all those infernal five weeks before I got out to it, I kept seeing horrors and hearing them. There was a lot of detail—

realism wasn't in it—and it was all correct; because I verified it afterwards. Things *were* just like that. Every morning when I got up I said to myself I'm going out to that damned war, but I wish to God somebody'd come and chloroform me before I get there. There were moments when I could have chloroformed myself. I felt as if it was the utter injustice of God that I—*I*—had to be mixed up in it.

"Not know what fear is!

"Just conceive," said Jimmy, "a man living like that, in abject, abominable terror, in black funk—keeping it up, all day and half the night, for five solid weeks—before he got there."

"And when you did get there," said Reggie, "were you in a funk?"

"Oh, well, you see, by the time I'd got there it had pretty well worn itself out. There wasn't any funk left to *be* in."

And when I saw Reggie look at him I knew he had scored again.

Still, I wondered how it really stood with them; and whether Reggie had settled with his doubt, or whether sometimes, when you caught him looking at Jimmy, it had come over him again. The kind of virtue his brother-in-law had displayed in Flanders wouldn't help him, you see, to that particular solution. And with the Thesigers —when they took after their mother—things died hard.

He must have felt that he had to settle it before he went.

Viola told us what happened.

It was his last evening, and the three were together in that room of Reggie's. He had just said that Viola wouldn't care how many Town Halls he was buried under,

as long as Jimmy didn't go and dig him out. And then, suddenly, he went straight for it.

"Jimmy," he said, "did you run away with my sister, or didn't you? I don't care whether you did or not, but—did you?"

"No, I didn't," said Jimmy.

"Then what the dickens," Reggie said, "were you doing together in Bruges?"

"We were looking at the Belfry," said Jimmy.

And Reggie shook his head. "That's beyond me," he said.

"Yes," said Viola. "But it wasn't beyond Jimmy."

That's the real story of Tasker Jevons and his wife.

Don't ask me what would have happened to them if there hadn't been a war.

I've tried to show you the sort of man he was. He knew his hour even before it found him. And you cannot separate him from his hour.

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